Working with Direct Clients

September 20, 2012

an ATA Webinar with

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American Translators Association
Who is on this call and why have you paid money to be here?
Poll 1: Who is on this call?
Poll 2: Are you currently working with direct clients?
Before seeking direct clients...

• Get some experience under your belt—translating, revising and working with peers.
• Invest in specialization—and be/get passionate about your subject(s).
• Speak your clients’ language fluently (and write it well, too).
• Be prepared to invest some time & budget; this is a long-term project.
• If you are not prepared to sign your work, maybe you’re not ready for this (= maybe working through an intermediary is the best option for you).
Where do direct clients hang out?

• Lots of places. But remember: you want good potential clients—clients with real budgets. If there’s no money, move on.

• If you live and work far from civilization/potential client watering holes, you may have to travel. That’s life. Identify key industry events and attend. Face time is good.

• Good clients are excited about what they do. To work with them, you should be excited, too.
PTERIS CRETICA MAYII

Fougère aux frondes persistante d’une vert lustré, traversée et portée par un pétiole brillant bien tourné blanc et avec extrémités terminées en divisions corymboïdées. Rustique -15°C
H 60cm. L. 60cm. Mi-ombre. Persistant.
Do your homework

• The reading and research you do to specialize will identify likely candidates—businesses or entities that need you and your language combination. Deals getting done. Deals shaping up.

• Get a clear idea of company structures and who does what. Ideally you will know people’s names (and job titles) before meeting them.
Get out of the house

- Go to client watering holes/conferences/events. Dress appropriately. Have an elevator speech & real business cards.
- Listen carefully to how potential clients talk.
- Don’t pitch right away; mingle with your prey to establish your expertise, brand & personality. (Latter should be friendly & upbeat if possible; if you are shy, aim for thoughtful and thorough.)
- Practice makes perfect.
Get off on the right foot

• Say something nice (to organizers/speakers/other attendees).
• Don’t wear out your welcome; show proper respect for their time (and yours).
• Don’t get pushy (arrogance, like desperation, is a huge turn-off) but don’t hide behind a potted palm either.
• Never ever complain about translators not gittin’ no respect.
Don’t get twitchy about...

• Money. This sends out entirely the wrong message. The hard-eyed, no-nonsense habits that have served you well with some translation intermediaries may come across as too adversarial (or insecure) with passionate direct clients.

• Being small. Small is beautiful (as long as it is skilled and specialized).
[A word about signing]

See paragraph in red below. This is one of six bullet points in a one-page summary of “how we work” that my new and prospective clients receive.

“Note that if translations are poured into new layouts or re-entered in any way, we check/revise proofs and sign off before printing, failing which a 150% surcharge is due (since the translator’s name appears in the credits for most of our texts).”
Read what your target group is reading

- At least one daily business newspaper
- Specialized press in the fields you are targeting
- Books of all sorts (often these will be reviewed in business newspapers & specialized press)
Read what your peers are reading

• Thoughtful bloggers in the language industry, starting with thoughtsontranslation.com*

• Sales & business gurus**

• Books on building your translation business***

* NB: for the rationale behind signing your work, see interview at: http://www.catherinetranslates.com/to-sign-or-not-to-sign-chris-durban-strikes-again/

** E.g., Seth Godin’s insightful posts at http://sethgodin.typepad.com/; Walt Kania’s excellent advice at www.thefreelancery.com, etc.

*** www.lulu.com
- “The Prosperous Translator” (ed. Chris Durban)
- “How to Succeed as a Freelance Translator” (C. McKay)
- “The Entrepreneurial Linguist” (D. & J. Jenner)

ATA Webinar Sees / September 20, 2012
Still hungry?

• Chris and Corinne are presenting at the upcoming ATA Annual Conference in San Diego, California.

• Chris is speaking for SENSE in Utrecht on Sept. 22; at BDÜ’s Interpreting the Future in Berlin, Sept. 28-30; and at TM-Europe 2012 in Warsaw, October 4-5.

• Both Chris and Corinne write regular blogs/columns and are always interested in readers’ comments and questions. 
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Thanks for listening.
Questions?

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