HOW TO FIND AND APPLY TO TRANSLATION AGENCIES/ LANGUAGE SERVICE PROVIDERS

MARKETING TIPS *for* TRANSLATORS

for a successful freelance career and lifestyle

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In the search to find a steady stream of clients, sometimes working with a translation agency can be your best bet, without ever having to hit the streets and actively market your individual services. Once you have established yourself with a few agencies that need your language combination and specialization, chances are that clients will begin funneling into your business.

Tens of thousands of agencies all over the world are looking for freelance translators just like you, but not all agencies are created equal. In fact, experience has taught me that agencies generally come in one of three varieties: smooth-operating professional agencies, price hagglers, and shady dealers. The first (and most recommendable) category consists of highly professional and successful organizations that truly value their translators and view them as business partners. The second category consists of agencies that are purely profit-driven, and will hire and fire translators every time the wind shifts. These agencies tend to view freelance translators as commodities rather than team members, and will try to haggle and drop prices whenever possible. The third and final category is the shady dealers. These agencies have suspicious backgrounds, poor business skills, and unethical practices and are likely never to complete payment for your services.

I recommend thinking of your agency as your business partner, and before you climb into bed with any agency, you'll want to interview them thoroughly and conduct your own outside research. Choosing the wrong agency can derail your translation business, while choosing the right one can reward you with a steady stream of high quality clients and a sustainable income you can be proud of.

Always research an agency before accepting work from them, and never be afraid to dump an agency if you find out that their working style is not in alignment with your values. Simply bow out as professionally as possible and keep looking for partners who will respect you and the work that you can contribute.

WHERE TO FIND TRANSLATION CLIENTS TO CONTACT

You can find lists of agencies in translation association directories, translation portals, databases for payment practices, and by conducting a simple online search. No matter which method you use, make sure you research each agency before you make the first contact. Google the agency's name to see if there is a website with contact information, check ratings via Payment Practices and/or Blueboard, ask colleagues if they have heard about the agency and so forth.

After checking credibility, you should also check whether the agency works with your particular language pair and areas of specialization. At this stage, I recommend creating a master Excel spreadsheet (as I mentioned in the ingredient list) with the agency name and a brief description about what makes that agency unique. This can help you streamline the process of contacting each one and tracking the results.

CONTACTING AGENCIES

Each agency will also have a different preferred method of communication. Some will ask you to fill out a form on their website, while others will invite you to email in your resume.

If you are asked to contact the agency by email, you can create an email template with the following information:

- **Subject Line**: Include your language combination and that you are a freelance translator looking for work/clients.
- **Email Body**: State that you would like to work for them as a freelance translator, highlight your accomplishments, experience, degrees and your field of specialization. Try to keep it brief, only two paragraphs.
- **Conclusion and Signature**: List your website if you have one and your contact information and ask them to check it out or contact you for further information.

KEEP TRACK AND FOLLOW UP

In your master Excel agency list, track the agencies you have contacted and follow up with an email in a week or so if you have not heard back. You can ask if they have received your email and if they have any questions or need further information.

I strongly advise against using purchased lists of agencies and spamming them with mass email campaigns containing your resume. Your goal is not to blanket the town with your resume. Your goal is to professionally and strategically target the agencies that you believe would be most interested in working with you. (Not to mention that these mass emails are impersonal and will usually never get opened.)

CHECKLIST FOR FINDING, VETTING AND APPLYING TO AGENCIES

WHERE TO FIND THEM:

- Translation Association Directories
- Paymentpractices.com
- Online Translation Portals

HOW TO VET THEM:

- Check their rating on payment practices lists
- Google them - address, website
- Ask colleagues

HOW TO APPLY TO THEM:

- Use the method indicated by agency (online or email)
- Application form: fill out all the details as thoroughly as possible.

EMAIL:

SUBJECT: Language combination, freelance translator

BODY: State that you would like to work for them as a freelance translator, highlight accomplishments, experience, degrees and specialization. Keep it brief!

CONCLUSION AND SIGNATURE: link to website, contact info ask them to contact you or go to website for more info.

FOLLOW UP: ASK IF THEY HAVE RECEIVED YOUR INFORMATION, IF THEY HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ETC.

WHAT AGENCIES LOOK FOR IN
TRANSLATOR APPLICATIONS – 12 TIPS

HOW TO APPLY:

1. Follow procedure indicated on agency website.
2. Do not use contact information from directory listing, go to website and use contact info there.

WHAT THE AGENCY CHECKS:

1. If applying by email: Is language combination included in subject?

2. Does CV include language combinations, expertise and experience

3. Valid referrals and references

4. Memberships in associations and professional organizations

5. Is the application free from grammar mistakes and errors?

6. Translator's website

7. Translator's social media profiles:

   - Is language combination included in profile

   - Does the linguist stay away from badmouthing clients and colleagues?

ONCE YOU HAVE RECEIVED FIRST JOB:

1. Always provide good quality, turn down jobs if too rushed.

2. Respond to inquiries promptly.

3. Stay in touch, show appreciation with Christmas card/gift.

FURTHER ACTIONS

Take a few hours to research potential agencies. Try to get a list of 100 agencies that pass the criteria mentioned above. Contact them by their preferred method of contact. You can perhaps contact five a day, or five a week, depending on your schedule, and don't forget to follow up if you do not hear from them.

CREATING YOUR OPTIMAL RESUME/CV FOR CONTACTING TRANSLATION AGENCIES

I am not entirely sure that freelance translators will need resumes in the future. Traditionally, resumes have been the most important marketing tool, and while they still are important, thanks to the development of online databases such as LinkedIn, they are quickly falling out of fashion. Today, more and more people start hunting for a translator with a quick Google search. Direct clients (_end clients) in particular are prone to looking up your information online and, if given the choice, many of them would rather look at your website or catalog.

That said, many translation agencies still make use of resumes in the recruitment process. However, many resumes fail to portray their owners as someone worth hiring. To succeed, your resume needs to be impeccable, concise, and informative enough to help it stand out amongst the clutter. It should also clearly state your industry along with any specializations. Ask yourself: are you a medical translator, an interpreter, or are you focusing on tourism or trash/recycling?

When writing a resume, bear in mind that different countries use different terms to describe this document. In international circles, the terms "resume" and "CV" (which stands for curriculum vitae) are often used interchangeably. But, depending on the country your prospective client lives in, the requirements of what information to include, and in what format to include information, may be different. For example, in the US, it is not customary to include a photograph of yourself in your resume, nor should you include information about your birthday, marital status, or other personal details. On the other hand, personal photographs and data are expected and often required on CVs in Europe and Asia.

CHARACTERISTIC OF A GREAT RESUME

In 2017, the average job posting received 250 resumes. If you want your resume to stand out from the crowd, you need to make sure it presents you in the best light. To ensure your resume shines, you need to make sure that it:

- Does not waste space on irrelevant or superfluous information

- Indicates your level of experience with specific CAT tools

- Details any knowledge or experience you have in DTP

- Includes any relevant association memberships, credentials, and certifications

- Has been proofread and edited numerous times by at least one other person

- Quantifies and contextualizes accomplishments whenever possible

- Is completely up-to-date

- Has a professional and easy-to-skim layout

- Leaves out buzzwords like strategic, result-focused, etc.

A resume that does all these things will quickly rise to the top of the interview pile.

THINGS TO AVOID IN YOUR RESUME

You can have the best resume in the world, but a single typo or poorly-worded sentence can easily cost you your dream job. The typical resume also features a couple things that drive hiring managers crazy. While building your resume, it's best to avoid:

- Using color photos, word art, or graphic images

- Including your birth date, marital status, or other personal information (particularly on US resumes)

- Providing a list of all your translation dictionaries

- Describing your hardware and a list of standard software applications

- Leaving generic fields empty (if you are using a resume template)

- Including your prices and rates

- Using unusual fonts or formatting

- Using acronyms or abbreviations

- Lying, embellishing, or inventing credentials; always be honest

- Submitting only hard copies; digital resumes are searchable and are highly preferred by many agencies

PROTECTING YOUR RESUME

Once you have crafted a CV that you are happy with, you should also make sure that you protect it from those who would try to steal your information. Sadly, CV fraud has become quite common among freelance translators today. Because you have spent considerable time and effort polishing your resume, I encourage you take a few minutes to keep it out of the hands of disingenuous translators.
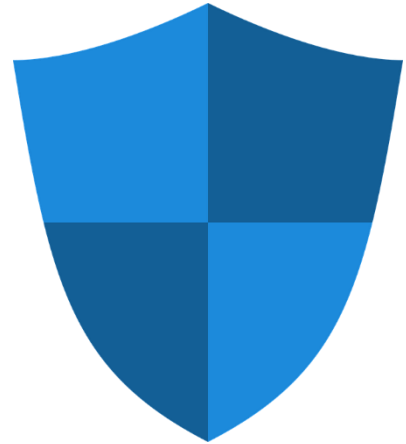
First, you should remove your CV from the Internet. Go to all the profiles that you have on job board sites and delete it. When that's done, do a Google search for your resume to see where it is still online. Of course, there will still be cached versions for a while, but at least it's a start.

When someone you trust requests to see a copy of your CV, create a password-protected PDF and send it to the potential client. Unfortunately, even a password-protected PDF can be opened with other non-Adobe versions of PDF readers. The safest alternative is to create an image file of your CV.

You can also utilize your LinkedIn profile as an alternative (or compliment) to your resume. Complete your profile with all the same descriptions, experience, and qualifications. Then, when a prospective employer requests to see your resume, simply ask them to connect with you on LinkedIn.

You should also get your own domain name and stop using Hotmail or Gmail. Then, you can assure potential clients that you'll never send them emails from addresses outside of your domain.

VERSIONING YOUR RESUME

At this point, you've probably realized that a single resume can't meet the needs of all your clients. Those of us fortunate enough to work in more than one segment or industry will need more than one CV. Furthermore, each of these base documents will need to be tweaked to fulfill the requirements of each individual job posting. You should also be sure to have version of each resume for every language you work in.

RESUME EXAMPLES

https://www.livecareer.co.uk/cv-search/r/freelance-translator-76650471

https://www.livecareer.co.uk/cv-search/r/freelance-translator-98877087

A FREELANCE TRANSLATOR'S RESUME - SECTION BY SECTION

1. HEADLINE

Your freelance translator's resume should start with you clearly stating your language combinations.

Example: English into French Freelance Translator

2. DESCRIPTION

Under the headline, give a short description of your services and specializations.

Example: translation, editing, proofreading and localization – IT, software, marketing, medical, etc.

3. EXPERIENCE

Use this section to list any jobs you have held over the past 10 years. If you have any translation experience, list this first and be as specific as possible.

Example: Translator for Optimize Medical – clinical trials 100,000 words (or number of years), EMA Templates for EU, etc.

If you have additional work experience that relates well to your linguistic career, it is good to briefly list this here too. Previous experience as a language teacher, a marketing manager, a researcher, or a tourist guide could easily prove useful to a freelance translator.

4. EDUCATION

This is where you list all your relevant education. If you are a recent graduate with a degree in translation or interpretation, you might list this first.

Example: Bachelor of Arts in translation – University – Year. Or, MBA – University, Year

5. CERTIFICATIONS AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

If you have any certifications, list them prominently on your CV. You can also include "certified" or "accredited" in the headline. Any relevant continuing education in either your area of specialization or in general translation shows that you care about keeping your skill set up to date.

6. CAT TOOLS

Translation agencies are interested in knowing what Computer Aided Translation Tools you use, and what version. I advise that you list them here. Conversely, there's no need to list your experience with more generalized PC tools and programs. If you're great at desktop publishing, however, feel free to make note of it.

7. OTHER RELEVANT INFO

If you have any hobbies or past experiences that might be relevant for your translation or interpretation career, it is good to list them at the end of your resume.

Tess Whitty is an English-Swedish freelance translator specializing in corporate communications, software and IT. Before she became a translator she studied and worked with marketing, and now shares her experience as a speaker and trainer at conferences. She is the author of the book "Marketing Cookbook for Translators", with easy to follow "recipes" for marketing your translation services, producer of the award winning podcast "Marketing Tips for Translators" and the creator of the Complete Marketing Course for Translators. For more information, and to connect, go to www.marketingtipsfortranslators.com.