

Episode 235: AMA – Growing a Business from the Start or After a Career Change

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Welcome to Marketing Tips for Translators, a podcast with marketing and business tips and strategies specifically for interpreters. I'm your host, Tess Whitty, a longtime freelance translator with an education and professional background in marketing. I give tips from my own experiences or from the experiences of other translators and industry experts.

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[0:01:38-0:02:37]

Hello, and welcome to another episode of Marketing Tips for Translators. I'm so glad you're here. I really appreciate all your feedback and questions. Today, I will answer some more of your questions. A few of you asked about how to grow a freelance linguist business from scratch or after a career change, so I will focus on those two questions today. The first question comes from Arta Demiri. She says, "Thanks for your help all this time. I have finished studies in English language and literature and I've been translating documents in the Albanian-English couple of languages and vice versa. But there's something here. I don't have a translation license and I can't translate official documents. My interest is how can I grow my business till I get the license."

[0:02:38-0:03:38]

Thank you for the question, Arta. The short answer is that you can still translate other documents apart from official documents until you get this license or certification. My question is what are you interested in? What would you like to specialize in? There are many business and marketing documents that need translation that aren't official documents. There are tourism documents, education documents, etc. You can be an intern and provide translation for free to organizations that want volunteer translators to gain some experience, but you can also apply to translation agencies and look for jobs on translation portals to get started. You can also work on getting certified in a language combination, which is the fast track to build credibility.

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Even non-language-related certifications can provide a doorway into niche industries. I know that you're working on getting certified so you can translate official documents, and that's a good start. Next, I think you should pick a niche or an area of specialization and stick with it. That way, you can learn industry-specific terms that mold you into a specialized asset (this can be within the areas of business, government, education, etc.) and then focus on selling yourself. Digitize yourself and your services with a website or blog and then join a community or professional organization so that in Albania or somewhere else, in the UK, for instance, you get credibility and a network of peers. You can also get certification opportunities and many other resources, including a listing of your information in the directory, so that's also a good start.

[0:04:38-0:05:37]

Where can you find paying translation jobs? You can find them on translation platforms and job boards. Many new translators get their first job from an online translation portal. You can apply for translation agencies—this is fantastic for gaining traction and exposure. If you become a trusted resource, you don't really have to go looking for clients. That said, I recommend being aware of scams. Not all agencies are legitimate and ethical, so always check their website. You can find them on LinkedIn or in directories, but always check them out first and make sure that they are both professional and ethical. If they're not, you don't have to work with them.

[0:05:38-0:06:38]

You also need to apply to many translation agencies. I already talked about joining LinkedIn groups, as it's the largest social network for professionals. You can join groups related to translation jobs or translation to further your career and develop connections. You can also look at general freelance websites. This can build up your portfolio and let clients come to you. It's a great learning tool to get experience, but the rates aren't the best and the competition is fierce. And, of course, don't forget to also look locally, use your personal network and former employers, and market yourself. You don't need to wait for your license. You can still do translation work. You can start by translating other documents that don't need a certification or accreditation first, so I would encourage you to do that.

[0:06:38-0:07:38]

When you're first starting out, it's also a numbers game. How many agencies can you get in touch with? How many projects can you apply for? How many contacts can you call or get in touch with? Eventually, you will be at a place where you're fully booked or even turning down projects because you're just too overloaded with work. Just keep going. Keep marketing. I have a whole podcast episode about this, episode 222, that I will link to in the show notes for this episode. You can also download a resource guide for where to apply for translation jobs when first starting out, so go check it out. The second question comes from Marcia Brando. She says, "I'm about to launch my translation business and my question is if

it's ok to start while building the business along the way, or if it's better to plan everything before actually starting.”

[0:07:38-0:08:37]

Thank you for this question, Marcia. It's a great question. If you have listened to me before, you have heard me say how important a marketing plan is. Planning is always good, but—and this is very important—you should still take action. You should still apply to agencies and clients. The most important thing for you as a beginning translator is to get experience. I recommend doing everything you can to get this experience. For example, start getting paying jobs on the side or in between applying for jobs. You can plan, you can set goals, and you can take stock of what you need to develop. You need a resume and a cover letter to even start applying, but the rest can come later.

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Your LinkedIn profile, your website, your Christmas cards, these are things you can work on while applying for jobs. As soon as you can, become a member of a professional association. I recommend doing that because you will get so much back from it in the form of networking connections, education, and a listing in their database, etc. I hope you found this answer valuable, Marcia. If not, you can always ask follow-up questions. The next question is about starting a freelance translation career after having worked in some other field, which is how I got started before the internet globalized the industry. It wasn't easy to get my first translation clients, and now, with people from less affluent countries flooding the market, it's harder than ever.

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I already talked about where to look for jobs and how to make it easier. When you first start out, tell everyone that you're a translator. Stay open-minded and fill in the gaps. Not having a job means you have time to work on your portfolio, CV, and other things. Try to keep it local. Make sure that you are listed locally and look into specializing as soon as you can. On to the next question. Lisa Crosta says, “It's a real pleasure having the opportunity to get in contact with you directly. I'm an enthusiastic follower of your podcast and I think your tips are extremely valuable. I'm actually getting back to my translation and interpretation studies after almost 10 years in sales.

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I worked for various companies in different fields, which was a really enriching experience both personally and professionally, but I just realized it's now time for a change. So my question is: how would you suggest one should manage a career change? In particular, while getting certified

and specialized in some specific translating or interpreting fields, how should one handle, in your opinion, this transition phase from one career to the other?” Thank you for this question, Lisa. It's also a very good one. The short answer is that you get started or transition the same way as a new linguist or translator. However, you already have an advantage in that you might already have an area of specialization in sales. I don't know which company you did sales for, but you should claim that area of specialization and try to get as much experience as possible in it.

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As for the actual transition, I would recommend a slow transition if possible. Keep working on your old job or go down to part-time while you work on your new freelance career, register in translation databases, become a member of a translation association, apply for translation jobs, and get certified. If you want to get a certification, you should research the requirements for it. It could be a certification for a translator or an interpreter, but learn the requirements. Take practice tests if they're available and then practice and prepare for the actual test. But the most important task for you is to start getting experience, both paid and unpaid, and gradually build up your business.

[0:12:28-0:13:09]

Thank you for your question. I hope you found the answer useful. The last question comes from Birgit Le. She says, “I have the following concern: right now, I am not working as a freelance translator. I had the opportunity to get a job in another industry and will probably stay 1 year ‘off’ from freelancing. Plus, I am considering taking an additional year to focus on some studies I wanted to complete. So, my questions are: How long a ‘break’ do you think can a freelance translator take without missing out too much on what is going on in the industry? What would be your advice on how to start the transition back to freelancing? By the way, it is not an option for me to take on only some projects from time to time, because of the heavy tax load as soon as I start freelancing again.”

Thank you for your question, Birgit. That sounds like an exciting opportunity for you, and I would take it. The big benefit of freelancing is that we decide when and where to work. If this job is in another industry and it will also give you more expertise in a field that you can translate in later, then that's great. I don't think there are any rules or recommendations for how long you can stay away from the industry. But if you are certain that you want to go back, I would try to keep at least keep up-to-date with the industry news, some colleagues, and perhaps even with some of your most valuable clients.

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Perhaps you can find a trusted colleague for them and then, once you are ready to go back, you can tell them and, of course, your colleague. Who knows, your colleague might even need your help by then. I hope that answered your question. Thank you to all of you, Arta, Marcia, Lisa, and Birgit, for your questions about getting started, transitioning from another career, how long of a

break you can take, and how to deal with that transition. I hope you and other listeners found my answers and tips useful. If you have any questions or feedback, don't hesitate to email me or leave a comment in the comments section of the show notes.

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