



Wordcraft Marketing: www.wordcraft.dk

The Complete 10-Step Beginner's Guide to a Successful Freelance Translation Career

Alan Frost M.Sc., MITI

With tips from
industry veterans to
help establish your
business today



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Preface: Qualifications and Scope

My name is Alan Frost, and I have been a full-time freelance translator since 2008. My first language is English, but I am based in Denmark, where I mostly translate Danish into English through my own company, Wordcraft Marketing. My educational qualifications include an M.Sc. in Economics and Business Administration and a B.Sc. in International Business from the Copenhagen Business School. I am also certified as a qualified translator through the Institute of Translation and Interpreting.

Today, I work regularly with several of the largest agencies in the world, and over the years, I have translated for large corporations, small business, government bodies, individuals, etc. The bottom line is that I have built a working business for myself, but this was not always the case. The first year or two were rough, largely because I had no idea what I was doing – that and the financial crisis at the time. I learned a lot of valuable lessons, and I did so the hard way.

The good news is that when a friend decided to become a translator a few years ago, I guided him into the industry and had him working full time in under two months.

Scope

This book is aimed at aspiring freelance translators. My goal is to help guide you to a successful career in freelance translation by sharing the things I learned as well as the advice of other experienced linguists.

The book is not targeted at a specific country, so certain elements are discussed generally and will require your own research (e.g. specific laws). When talking of prices, I use both USD and EUR. The book itself is written in US English.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Many people dream of being able to work from home. There is a certain freedom and independence that comes with freelance work and the ability to shape and define your work schedule as you see fit. And who doesn't want to be one button away from being "at the office"? That said, freelance translation is not for everyone. You need the right skills, and you need to be the sort of person who can work independently, in near seclusion, and often with tedious and monotonous texts.

The layout of this book

- **Chapter 1:** Basic definitions and introduction to the industry
- **Chapter 2:** An overview of all the language services that you might offer as a freelance translator since virtually no translator limits themselves to just translation.
- **Chapter 3:** A brief introduction to computer-aided translation tools, which is something almost every translator will need to use.
- **Chapter 4:** The 10 steps to effectively establish yourself as a successful freelance translator.
- **Chapter 5:** A few fictitious examples, just to show how the different steps might be applied in practice.
- **Chapter 6:** Tips and pitfalls within different areas.
- **Chapter 7:** A collection of resources with external links.

Feel free to skip ahead if you like, but please note that I do assume a basic understanding of the information presented in the early chapters.

Basic definitions

Translation: This refers only to written translation. It does not include interpreting.

Freelance translator: Refers to translators who work as independent contractors, often with multiple clients. This is different from in-house translators, who are basically normal employees in a company. As a freelancer, you do not receive a salary, instead you take work as it comes, and you invoice each project. This does not mean that work is necessarily sporadic; in fact, it can be very regular. However, your relationship to the client is not as an employee; instead, you are contracted on a project by project basis.

Project/job: Any translation assignment, be it three lines for a menu or the latest epic fantasy novel.

Source and target: Source refers to either the document or the language FROM which you are translating. Target refers to either the document or language TO which you are translating.

Agencies and direct clients: A direct client is a company or person from any industry who requires translation services. A translation agency is a company that acts as a middleman between translators and direct clients. Generally, you will get lower prices from agencies, but they will usually do some of the work – e.g. marketing (they find the clients for you), handling document conversions, fixing technical issues, coordinating large projects with multiple linguists, etc.

Client/customer: The agency or direct client who contracted you for a project or job.

Project manager or PM: The person from an agency who is handling your project.

Translation specializations

The translation industry is very broad. It is so broad in fact that the requirements for certain specializations differ entirely from others. Translators specialize not only in different language combinations, but within different areas. Possible specializations include marketing, finance, law (business, criminal, tort), medicine & pharma, IT, engineering, education, subtitling, literary translations, and so on.

When you start, you will have to pick one or more areas of specialization based on your educational background and experience. Then, as you learn, study, and gain experience, you may add more. It is important to understand though that the translation industry is not a very forgiving one. Clients come to us for professional

translations – which requires that you have an in-depth understanding of the terminology and industry standards as well as the sort of language that is appropriate for that specific target audience.

For example, a marketing text is usually very loosely translated. The focus is to create a text that flows as naturally as if it had been originally written in that target language while still delivering the intended message. By contrast, legal and technical translations focus primarily on conveying the precise meaning, and even though you are expected to make the text read well, you have far less freedom to play around with the words.

A basic introduction to the freelance translation industry

The freelance translation industry is a very large industry, spanning virtually every sector, but it is also one with few barriers to entry. This has had both a negative and a positive effect. On the positive side, people who are qualified can easily set up a business and start working almost right away. You can be ready to go within days, quite literally, and with very few expenses.

On the negative side, people who are not qualified can easily do the same. Often, these translators also undercut the market prices. This is a problem because it is often difficult for a client to determine the competence of a translator before they are hired. Similarly, it can also be difficult for direct clients or even agencies to evaluate the translated text if it is in a language they do not themselves master.

The bottom line is that the industry has come under severe price competition, and many clients do not know what to choose. In the worst case, among less knowledgeable clients, translation is sometimes seen as a generic good. Like buying potatoes. This could not be further from the truth when it comes to the damage that a bad translation can do – just think in terms of a mistranslated contract, user manual for a medical device, blueprints for a building, or even a marketing text.

Another major factor that has been re-shaping our industry is technology. Machine translation is being increasingly used in combination with human post editors. A post editor is basically someone who proofreads a machine translated text. Certain segments of the industry are more affected than others, with the least affected areas being those that depend on creative formulation (e.g. literary translations and marketing). More on this in Chapter 2, but for now, you should know that this will be an increasingly important part of our business in most fields going forward.

Chapter 2: Translation and Related Language Services

As I said before, very few translators work solely with translation. The most common pairing is translation and proofreading, but linguists may offer any number of other services. Some of the more common are listed and explained below.

Proofreading/editing: Sometimes a distinction is made between proofreading and editing, where proofreading is a more superficial check of the basic translation and grammar, while editing involves a deeper re-wording of the target text. I often find that, in the translation industry, proofreading is used to cover both. In other words, when an agency tells you they want a text to be proofread, they typically mean they want the text to be correct and to flow well.

However, you should be mindful of this possible distinction, and you should be clear regarding what you are expected to do. Henceforth, I will generally just refer to this set of services as “proofreading”.

Proofreading can be offered as a standalone service or in connection with a translation. For example, many of the quality-conscious agencies will use two linguists on each project (sometimes more), where one acts as the translator and the other as the independent or external proofreader. No matter how good you are, a second set of eyes will nearly always be able to find something that can be fixed or improved.

Proofreading can also be offered for translated texts or just for a single language. For example, I proofread Danish – English translations, but I also proofread English texts that were written directly in English. Sometimes these were written by a native speaker who needs the text to be touched up a bit, while other times the text was written by a non-native speaker and therefore needs a lot of work.

Post editing: As mentioned earlier, this refers to proofreading texts that have been machine translated. Usually this pays quite a bit more per word than regular

proofreading, but it also takes longer. In most fields, translators must come to terms with the inevitability of post editing work since it will be more and more prevalent going forward.

It is also important to note that post editing takes practice. I personally detest it. Even though I am a very experienced proofreader, with about a third of my income from proofreading and quality assurance work, I find post editing to be both tiring and frustrating. The types of mistakes the machine makes are beyond illogical, and I struggle spotting them. For instance, a machine may translate the name of an institution correctly 99 times and then introduce a tiny subtle error for absolutely no reason.

The worst part of machine translation, in my opinion, is that it will tend to present you with sentences that almost flow well, but not quite. To make them sound good, you often have to change the whole sentence structure. This takes time and therefore puts the post editor in a position where they have to choose between great quality and low pay, and so-so quality and good pay. I should also add that the quality of the output will vary between different programs and with different languages.

All that said, you (and I) will have to accept post editing sooner rather than later. There is no way around it in the long term.

Transcreation and copywriting: Transcreation is a term sometimes used for very loose translations, for example within marketing, where you are basically creating a new text on the basis of the source. You are given free reigns here to deviate substantially in order to make the text flow as naturally as if it had been written in that language to begin with. Sometimes the word transcreation is not explicitly used, but the instructions you get will imply that this is what you are supposed to do.

Copywriting involves writing marketing texts from scratch. This is a less common combination, but some linguists do offer these services. Copywriting is an entirely different discipline though, so it is well beyond the scope of this book.

Interpreting: Interpreting involves verbal translation, either on-site or via software like Skype. The skills necessary to be an interpreter differ greatly from being a translator, and needless to say, you require verbal fluency in both languages. This too is well beyond the scope of this book.

Transcription: This involves transcribing from audio to text. Transcription on its own is a very competitive industry, and it requires that you are a fast typist and that

you possess the right equipment (referring here to the special pedal that is used to pause the text). From my basic research, transcription as an independent discipline does not generally pay very well.

However, what is more common for us translators is to be offered combination jobs, which typically involve translating directly from an audio file. I am not an expert with this niche, but I can say that, beyond your own skill and equipment, you have to be very careful with the quality of the audio and the number of people speaking when pricing yourself for such a job.

Voice-overs: This is another service that some linguists offer. It involves recording audio over a video clip, e.g. for a commercial or an educational video. It is sometimes combined with translation if the client's video was originally recorded in a different language.

Chapter 3: Computer-Aided Translation Tools

Computer Aided Translation (CAT) tools are NOT machine translation. Machine translation produces translated texts, while CAT tools are productivity tools designed to help the translator work better and faster.

When you open a text in a CAT tool, it will create a new bilingual file with all the segments that need to be translated on one side and empty boxes for your translation on the other. A segment is generally a full sentence. As you work, the tool records every sentence you translate into a translation memory (TM). Using this TM, the CAT tool will then recognize identical or similar sentences (the latter called “fuzzy matches”) in this text or in future projects and present you with your own previous translation. You can also perform searches inside TMs for specific words, e.g. if you know you translated the name of a component in a previous text, but cannot remember what on earth it was called or if you simply want to double check for consistency.

CAT tools can also handle a wide range of file formats, turning them into the same kind of bilingual file. Then, when you are done translating, they can “clean” the translation and produce a target document in the same format and with the same layout as the original. Take for instance a PowerPoint presentation with many text boxes. Translating that without a CAT tool is a giant pain, but with a CAT tool, it will be like any other translation. Then, when you are done, you can ask the tool to clean the document and produce an identical PowerPoint presentation in the target language. All you may have to do now is a bit of formatting to account for changes in the length of the text.

The bilingual files in the CAT tool's format are called “unclean” files, while the end products, as explained above, are called “clean” files. This distinction may be important since some agencies will want the unclean files, other agencies will only want the clean files, while some may ask for both.

CAT tools can also use glossaries of terms, which will indicate the preferred translation for a source term whenever it comes up. There are also a number of quality checks that can be performed, where the tool will highlight potential errors including capitalization inconsistency, end punctuation differences, extra spaces, repeated words, etc.

CAT tools range in usefulness. They are of virtually no use to a literary translator, who needs to focus purely on flow and creative language. They are moderately useful for a marketing translator, who also primarily focuses on language flow. However, they are invaluable for any document that requires consistent terminology (e.g. technical, legal, medical, etc.), has lots of repetitions or partial repetitions, or comes in formats that are difficult to work with or that would otherwise require software you might not own (e.g. InDesign).

For most agencies these days, CAT tools are mandatory. This is because they not only increase speed and improve accuracy, but they also allow agencies to create client-specific TMs that they can use and expand over years and years. This means that the agency can use different translators, all of which will benefit from and contribute to the existing TM. In addition, agencies do not want to pay you for work that you (or another translator) has already done, so they will usually use a discount grid, whereby they pay a set fraction of your rate for fuzzy matches and repetitions (more on this in Step 7 in Chapter 4).

Choosing a CAT tool

The problem here is that there are lots of CAT tools out there, varying in price and complexity, and compatibility between them is limited. I will discuss the issue of compatibility at the end of this chapter.

Agencies will sometimes give you access to a CAT tool via a temporary license. However, in many cases they expect you to have your own, and a few will only work with you if you have SDL Trados Studio.

Here is a rundown of some of the major CAT tools on the market. Please note, this list is not exhaustive, nor do I have any affiliation to any of these products. In the interest of full disclosure, I use SDL Studio, Wordfast Pro, GeoWorkz Translation Workspace, and Memsource regularly, and MemoQ occasionally. I have also tried several other CAT tools (including Metatexis, MateCat, Across, OmegaT, etc.) but it

was long ago, so I will refrain from any personal opinions on any of those. Instead, I will provide a couple of external links, including to some of the top free CAT tools.

SDL Trados Studio: Probably the closest we have to an industry standard is the software produced by SDL, which is sometimes just called Studio, other times just called Trados. The specific product most translators use is SDL Trados Studio Freelance. Studio is generally more expensive and comes with a huge array of functions. In the past Trados had a reputation for not being user friendly at all, but in recent years this is no longer an issue. In fact, today, it is one of my favorite CAT tools to work with – the other being Memsources (see below).

SDL has regular sales where the product is offered at 30% or more off, though it will still be a substantial investment. That said, there are agencies out there which will only work with you if you own this program, so it is something you should at least consider. You can also get a fully functional 1-month free trial.

Wordfast: This program comes in several versions, including a very simple add-on for Word (called Wordfast Classic) and standalone software (Wordfast Pro), which can handle multiple file formats. Generally, Wordfast is lighter and cheaper, and Wordfast Pro is a very solid tool indeed. However, while being a major player, it is not used as commonly as Studio.

Wordfast can be used for free with a limitation on the size of the TM you can save. There is also a completely free browser version called Wordfast Anywhere. I have not had the chance to use this, but the impression I get online is generally positive, but it might be a bit buggy.

MemoQ: Another “heavy” program similar in many ways to Studio, though not as widespread. I use it with a temporary license provided by an agency that uses this tool exclusively. Apparently, it has certain benefits for collaboration between translators. From my perspective, I find the tool to be somewhat cumbersome and frustrating. It is also one of the most expensive. That said, some translators absolutely love it.

Memsources: This is a cloud-based CAT tool, which has made great strides on the market. Memsources is more basic, not very expensive, straightforward to use, and also offers a generous free option. Memsources is one of the CAT tools for which some agencies provide temporary licenses. Overall, I find the Memsources experience to be quite seamless and smooth when using the downloadable client. They also have an online browser option, which works fine for small projects but is too slow for large ones.

GeoWorkz Translation Workspace: I am going to keep this one short. While the company that owns this is among the biggest, best and most professional translation agencies out there, the tool itself (or the set of tools) is not user-friendly at all. I cannot in good conscience recommend it.

Free CAT tools: There are a number of free options out there. I cannot offer my personal opinion on them since the free CAT tools way back when I started were abysmal. In recent years, I only used MateCat once when asked to do so by an agency and, apart from the ridiculously comical name, it was a decent tool. Even if you might eventually choose to go for a paid option – depending on your clients – there is nothing wrong at all with starting with a free tool. Here is a link to a nice review of five popular options:

<https://www.translationdomain.com/software/5-free-cat-tools-to-use-in-2019/>

CAT tool overview: This includes other established CAT tools that I have not listed above, in particular Deja-vu and Across.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_computer-assisted_translation_tools

My advice

If money is an issue, start with a free tool, such as MateCat or Wordfast Anywhere, and familiarize yourself with the basics. There is a certain similarity to the way CAT tools work, so once you are comfortable with a couple of them, you should be able to start using a new one very quickly. Consider also taking advantage of the free trials and free versions of some of the major players.

If you are not going to begin by investing in SDL Studio, then one idea would be to save the 1-month free trial in case you run into clients who use it exclusively. Then once you start working and see where the dust settles, you can decide if this investment would be right for you.

That said, if money is not an issue, I would recommend SDL Studio Freelance simply because it may open more doors than the other options.

CAT tools and compatibility

This section is really only relevant if you have one CAT tool and you are trying to make it work with files or a translation memory (TM) produced by another CAT tool. If this is not relevant, just skip it for now.

When it comes to working with multiple CAT tools, there are three options. First, many CAT tools open formats produced by SDL Trados Studio. This is not always perfect though, and I have encountered issues working this way before, but it can definitely be an option if you encounter a client that uses SDL exclusively (and you did not invest in that tool).

Second, there is the XLIFF format, which stands for XML Localization Interchange File Format and is a universal standard for CAT tool exchange. However, there may be technical issues associated with different XLIFF versions, export, import, etc. At this stage, you just need to know that this is something you may or may not encounter, and if you do, you can check how your CAT tool deals with such files. In most cases, you would get XLIFF from agencies, and then they should either handle or be able to assist with the technical side.

Finally, when it comes to translation memories (TMs), most CAT tools can convert whatever format they use for the TM into a “universal” standard called TMX. This TMX can then be imported into another CAT tool and then exported back to a TMX. This allows a translator to use a TM created with a different tool and to return the new (and expanded TM) back to the client in a format that can be used by anyone else in the future.

Chapter 4: 10 Steps to a Successful Career

Step 1: Is this right for you?

I really need you to take a moment here and consider what you are getting yourself into. Even assuming fantastic qualifications on your part, translation is not for everyone. Not by a long shot. You need to be able to work on your own with little direct human contact and to manage your time without supervision.

You also need to understand that you will get no sick days, holidays, pension contributions, etc. Below is a quick overview of the pluses and minuses.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Independence and the ability to shape your own work schedule (to some degree).</p> <p>Work from anywhere you have a computer and internet connection.</p> <p>No transport time/costs: The time it takes to be at work is literally how long it takes for your PC (etc.) to boot up.</p> <p>No work-related costs associated with transport, dry cleaning, etc.</p>	<p>Work availability can fluctuate depending on clients and the economy.</p> <p>You work alone and are responsible for everything. No office social life.</p> <p>Pay your own pension contributions, holidays, sick days, etc.</p> <p>Unpaid administrative work, in particular answering emails, marketing, invoicing, and accounting.</p> <p>Work can be very monotonous.</p>

As you can see, the list is somewhat skewed to the right. You might ask yourself why anyone would want to do this? Personally, I place a great deal of value on working from home and being independent. For you, it might be something else. The one thing

I would urge you to do is consider whether you can work in near isolation, year in and year out. Many people cannot.

Step 2: Are you qualified? Assessing education, experience, and skill

If you still think that freelance translation is for you, the next step is to assess if you are qualified for this line of work. It goes without saying that you need to be very skilled in at least two languages. Unless you are truly bilingual, you should generally only translate from your weaker language (the source language) into your first language (the target language).

You also need excellent writing skills and a near-perfect command of grammar in your target language. When you write as a professional, the expectations are sky high. Of everything mentioned in this book, this is entirely non-negotiable; you cannot be a good translator without superb command of your target language.

The assessment should consider three elements:

- Education and experience
- Areas of specialization
- Current translation skill level

Education & experience

Education: You do not need a degree in anything in particular to be translator, but it really helps, and some agencies require an undergraduate degree. Obviously, a degree in languages or translation is very useful, and so are degrees that combine languages with other disciplines (e.g. business and a foreign language). However, any kind of further education is a major asset.

Many translators, including myself, come from backgrounds in other fields than languages, and some of the most sought after are law, finance, marketing, medicine, IT, engineering, and literary. However, this is just scratching the tip of the iceberg since there are numerous other fields that can lead to work, e.g. other business disciplines (like HR), specific industry experience (e.g. construction, automobiles, etc.), education, science, food, sports, gaming, history, psychology, etc. Of course, having an education that can be linked to something that is in high demand will make things a lot easier.

The bottom line is that a degree of higher education gives you credibility and a place to start defining your specializations. You can then expand your areas slowly through further research, courses, and work experience. That said, I have encountered translators who had no such degree. Instead, they combined many years of experience in a certain field with relevant courses.

Experience: Similarly to education, experience is not strictly necessary, but it is valuable. This includes previous work with languages, e.g. as an educator, clerk, or journalist, as well as work within specific fields and in specific industries. As I mentioned above in the education section, certain fields are more sought after than others, so if you can demonstrate experience within such areas, it will be easier for you to get regular projects and earn a good living.

It is perhaps safe to say that you will need either a solid education or strong work experience. One can compensate for the other, but if you have neither, I think it will be nearly impossible to break into this business.

What should you specialize in?

Now that you have established what you are demonstrably good at, i.e. what you can claim in your CV in a way that inspires enough confidence for clients to hire you, it is time to establish your specialization areas. In the translation world, it is not enough that you translate from language A to language B. The terminology, standards, and expectations of the target audience may differ greatly between industries and fields, which means that translators need (and are expected) to specialize.

Focus on your strengths, and particularly those strengths that you can demonstrate in your CV. A potential client will begin by looking at your CV to see why you think you are an expert in the fields you have chosen. Try not to overreach here. Reputations are very hard to repair both with agencies and direct clients.

For example, when I started, I worked mostly with business subjects, as I have a master's in economics and business administration. Quickly though, I began working more and more with law. At first it was just business law since I had some knowledge of that from university, but over time I familiarized myself with different aspects. Today, law is one of my three primary specialization areas, together with business and IT. Beyond this, I have nearly a dozen sub-specializations in more niche areas.

My point is that you need to start by establishing a solid base from where to build your business. Focus on your main strengths, and then grow from there as you gain experience.

Assess your current translation skill level

If you do not already have solid translation experience, you need to test the waters first. Translate some sample texts, and if possible, have someone else assess your work. You could volunteer your services to a person or organization that needs them, or you can just pick a text within your specialization area(s). Remember, it is not just

about accuracy and terminology, it is also about using the type of language that is suitable for your target audience and about making the text sound natural.

Quality is paramount, but speed is also a concern. It is always difficult to give exact numbers, but from what I have gathered, translators probably work between 250 and 600 words per hour, depending on the difficulty of the text (e.g. a very heavy technical document would be on the lower end, while an easy text would fall on the higher end). The American Translators Association (ATA) estimates 300-400 words/hour for seasoned translators.

Time yourself and see how many words you can translate comfortably per hour. A translator will virtually always produce a first draft and then proofread the translation, so what I am talking about here is the final product – the one you would be delivering to the client. Pick something moderately difficult and see how it goes. You will get faster as you get better, but even now, if you are struggling to get over 300 words per hour with a moderate text, you might have a hard time making decent money.

Step 3: What language services should you offer?

In Chapter 2, I outlined some of the most common language services that translators may work with in addition to translation. This is not mandatory by any means, but it will definitely help you make a decent income.

I will keep this section short. Most – virtually all – translators also offer proofreading between the same two languages. This is a big business area because, as I mentioned before, agencies often use two linguists on a project: one as the primary translator and the other as the independent or external proofreader.

Offering proofreading in just one language, e.g. proofreading texts that were written directly in English, is also extremely common.

Finally, post editing is another fairly common service, which is gaining ground. Many translators are apprehensive about working with this discipline for reasons I outlined in Chapter 2, but for most subjects, there will be no way around it going forward.

Therefore, my recommendation is that you include all of these services from the very beginning. If you are hesitant about post-editing, you can leave it out of your marketing materials to begin with. You will most likely encounter agencies that will ask you to do it anyway, and then you can slowly gain experience that way. There are also all sorts of training resources one can find on the subject.

Useful secondary skills: Here, I am just going to list a few things that you would benefit from in different contexts. All of these can be developed with a little practice.

- **A decent typing speed:** You do not need to be extremely fast, but you will have a small advantage the faster you are. For many documents, speed is not really an issue, but then there will be some easy ones where you can lay down a first draft practically as fast as your fingers can type. In the very least, try to develop modest typing skills.
- **A minimum level of IT literacy:** Translations today are done almost exclusively on the computer using specialized CAT tools and other software. None of this is rocket science, but you do need basic skills with respect to your operating system and installing/configuring/uninstalling programs. Sometimes it may even take a bit of troubleshooting if you are unlucky.

- **Basic internet research skills:** The better you are here, the more you will benefit. The basic requirement is to have a minimal understanding of Google searches (text and images). Beyond this, if you learn how to use simple operators (like inverted commas, “filetype”, “intitle”, “inurl”, etc.) as well as reverse image search your life will be easier. Here is a list of Google operators – but remember only some of these will actually be useful:

<https://moz.com/learn/seo/search-operators>

Step 4: What do you need to get started and what does it cost?

One of the advantages of freelance translation relative to other businesses is that it is very low cost. That said, you should count on certain potential expenses – depending a bit on what you already own. Below, I tried to piece together a list of things you will or may need, rating each on the following scale: must-have, useful, optional. I will also try to indicate a rough price, though some items will vary immensely depending on your needs and location, and in such cases I will just discuss the costs or offer a very broad range.

Item	Cost	Rating
<p>Computer system. Setups vary here. A colleague of mine uses a quality laptop and that’s it. I use a desktop with two monitors, a 32-inch and a 28 inch. This allows me to put my file on one side and everything else, including the browser window(s) with my email, research sites, dictionaries, etc. on the other. It is also immensely useful for proofreading two documents side by side.</p> <p>You should also consider what happens if your computer or monitor breaks down in the middle of a project.</p>	Depends entirely on preference.	Must-have
<p>Internet connection. It does not need to be very fast, but it does need to be reliable. A backup is also strongly recommended. My backup is the internet on my phone, which I have had to connected to my computer during rare outages.</p>	Depends on connection speed and location.	Must-have
<p>MS Office. You absolutely must have a relatively recent version of MS Office. There are free solutions out there – very good ones in fact – but you will run into compatibility issues.</p>	Office 365 – prices seem to vary in different markets, but it should be under USD 100/year or EUR 90 per year	Must-have
<p>Email hosting/website. Building your own website is optional, but useful. However, being able to send email from your own domain is a must-have. Free email services have a very bad reputation because our industry is FULL of scammers. This includes</p>	Discount options start at as little as USD 30-35 or around EUR 30/year.	Must-have for email

<p>identity theft. I first realized my identity had been stolen when I received an email application from “me”. Today, I send more or less anything from Gmail straight into the trash.</p> <p>So never use free email like Gmail or Yahoo. Scammers virtually never use paid email since that requires identification and it is much easier to have your account closed down.</p>		Useful for website
<p>Printer/scanner. This is definitely not something you will need regularly, but it may be useful particularly in the initial application process. Many agencies will send you contracts and/or other documents that you need to print, sign, and scan.</p>	From USD 50 or EUR 45 and up.	Optional
<p>Computer security software. In our line of work, you really need to protect your computer. Not only will you come in contact with a multitude of files, but sending infected files is a huge no-no. In the very least you can use the free Windows security in combination with a good free antivirus program like Avast.</p> <p>However, I would always recommend investing in a proper security suite so that you get a powerful firewall (as well as other defenses). Any of the top ones will do, be it Norton, McAfee, Kaspersky, Bullguard, etc.</p>	Usually between USD 25 and 100 or EUR 20-90 per year.	Must-have
<p>Accounting software/assistance. This will depend greatly on your area and your income level. However, in the very least, everyone will need some sort of basic accounting tools, whether an online solution or a template in Excel.</p> <p>Hiring accountants can be quite expensive depending on a number of factors, but in most cases, you will not need to (at least to begin with), so I will leave that out at this stage.</p>	Free – USD 300/EUR 270 per year for accounting solutions. Plenty of free Excel templates.	Must-have
<p>CAT tool(s). As we discussed above, most translators will need/benefit from a CAT tool. Not all need to purchase a paid solution though.</p>	0 – USD 700/EUR 625 for	Useful / must-have

	one CAT tool license.	
Memberships to sites and forums. There are several good places to find work, and paid memberships often offer real advantages. More on this in Step 9.	Membership to ProZ or TranslatorsCafe is USD 110/year (roughly EUR 100)	Useful
Dictionary subscriptions. This is so specific to your language combination, areas of specialization, and country of residence that I cannot offer anything concrete. All I can say is that you will most likely benefit from subscribing to one or more good online dictionaries. Paper dictionaries are just too slow. Specialized dictionaries, e.g. a Spanish to English medical dictionary, are also a good idea.	Cheap for regular dictionaries, moderate for specialized.	Useful
Certification and qualification bodies. Certification can mean different things in different places. Moreover, the process will vary from country to country. There are plenty of bogus certification bodies out there, but of the good ones, you have the American Translators Association (ATA) in the US, while in the UK you have the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI) and the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL). Being certified through these bodies is neither cheap nor easy, and it may not be possible until you have a number of years of experience.	ATA: \$204 per year plus \$525 for sitting the exam. CIOL’s Diptrans: £616 ITI: application fee of £60, assessment fee of £389, and then £235 per year	Optional

Also keep in mind that many of your costs may be tax deductible. Familiarize yourself with the rules in your country/area.

Step 5: Presenting yourself

There are a number of ways to present yourself to the industry. Here are some of the most common:

Your CV: This is extremely important since it is always the first thing clients want to see. Choose a nice, simple design (there are many available online), and really take your time to highlight anything and everything that could be construed as an advantage to working with languages. Include the following:

- Your language combination(s)
- All the language services you provide
- Your specializations and possibly secondary specializations
- Your work experience
- Education and courses
- Any relevant projects, publications, awards, etc.
- Any certifications or accreditations
- The CAT tool(s) that you own and/or know how to use
- Your contact details (e.g. in the header)

You can also include your rates, but that is entirely optional. I prefer to mention those in the body of the email since it gives me some freedom to charge differently depending on the client/situation. Also optional are any references and a summary at the top of the CV. In general though, keep it **relevant** and stick to the things that will help you land the client or the job. No one wants to wade through pages of irrelevant information.

Online profiles: The two major players here are ProZ and TranslatorsCafe. I will link to other options in Chapter 7 under resources, but for now, let's just discuss public profiles in general. Making a profile on these sites has two benefits. First, it can lead to work and to connections with agencies. Second, some profiles have built-in rating systems, so they can be used as a marketing tool. I have not focused much on this myself, but I know others who have done so very successfully. A profile full of positive feedback and with the maximum star rating can be an effective way to stand out. More on this under marketing.

Your own website: This is not a must, but it can certainly be useful as a marketing and branding tool, and it has the advantage that you have full control over everything. Some translators like to create their own sites, while others focus more on their public profiles on major translation sites like ProZ or TranslatorsCafe.

If you do build a site, keep the design simple and professional. Focus on the client and the specific benefits that they will gain from hiring you. Remember, when someone visits your site, they do not really care about *you*; they only care about the problems you can solve for *them*. More on this in Step 8.

If you are new to the whole web design thing and want to do it yourself, I would recommend Wix for its simplicity and versatility. Otherwise, use any CMS you are familiar with, e.g. Wordpress. As I will discuss later, I do not believe that SEO should be a major concern because the top results for translation-related searches are dominated by machine translation like Google Translate.

Emails: When approaching an agency, you need to have an email template prepared. Approaching direct clients by email is a trickier matter because it might violate anti-spam laws in some countries (more on this in Step 9 under email marketing). For now, I will limit this to agencies.

When using email to contact agencies, you really do not need a cover letter in the traditional sense, in fact that would generally look odd.

What you need is a short email that presents the most important data they are looking for. Feel free to promote yourself a bit, but generally limit the fluff and mention relevant information like language pairs and first language, experience, education, areas of specialization, CAT tools, and rates. Keep it brief, e.g. two short paragraphs, unless the job specifically requires you to explain something in more detail. Also, highlight what is most relevant to that particular client or job, in terms of skills, experience, etc.

If you happen to have one, you could also include an external link to a profile that makes you look good (like your own site or a well-crafted ProZ profile with positive ratings). Finally, attach your CV and tell them you would be happy to provide any additional info. And that's pretty much it.

Social media: Great for networking, both in terms of being part of a community of linguists and also for finding clients. Facebook groups for translators are a great way to develop a network, ask questions, get terminology help, stay in touch with developments in the industry, and respond to jobs posted within the group. LinkedIn is another option used by many translators to promote themselves.

Business cards: These are useful if you attend events, conferences, etc. Some translators focus on this aspect and therefore need quality business cards, while others

(like me) have never attended any kind of live event. If you do promote yourself this way, make sure to always have business cards ready to hand out. Combining your cards with a well-designed website can help develop your brand.

Step 6: What rates should you charge?

This section deals with your base rates; we will talk about discounts and additional charges in the next section. Unfortunately, there is little consensus in the industry, and it is VERY hard to determine any standard market price. On a Facebook group I frequent, we often argue about this when new translators ask this question.

First a quick explanation of how prices are calculated. The industry standard is to charge per source word. You have to be careful here because heavy subjects like law tend to have longer words, and certain languages like to combine multiple words to form new words. For example, in Danish “translation agency” would be “oversættelsesbureau” – composed of “oversættelse” (translation) and “bureau” (agency). Sometimes these words can get really ridiculous, but they still only count as one source word.

You may also encounter other pricing models, e.g. per 1000 words, per page (though the page is usually defined as X number of words, so in the end it is the same model) or per character. You might also see prices quoted per line, where the line is defined as a certain number of characters. In the end, they can all easily be converted to either per word or per character, where the former is vastly more common than the latter. So much so, that I have only been approached with a per character quote once in 12 years.

You will also often be asked for your hourly rate. While this is rarely used for translation, charging per hour is somewhat common when pricing proofreading services because the quality of the text can vary immensely; however, even there you are usually expected to provide an estimate for how much time it will take and to indicate if that estimate will be exceeded substantially.

The bottom line is that agencies will typically ask for the following:

- Your standard per word rate for translation.
- Your standard per word rate for proofreading.
- Your hourly rate – usually to be used for proofreading, but sometimes for other things as well.

With direct clients, you can often use a range, e.g. USD 0.14 – 0.18 dollars per word, enabling you to charge more for difficult projects and less for easy ones. However, agencies virtually always want ONE universal rate. This means that easy projects will

earn you a lot more, and difficult projects will earn you a lot less. That's just the way it is.

The price you charge will vary depending on:

- **Your language combination.** Some languages are much more expensive than others. In part it has to do with the wage levels of the native speakers of the target language. In part it has to do with rarity. Something like English to Romanian will be much cheaper than English to Norwegian. Norway is a very expensive country with high wages and high taxes, and since you almost always want a native Norwegian to do that translation, they will charge a lot more.
- **Your specialization areas.** Certain subjects like law, finance, IT, engineering and medicine command a higher per word price. They also tend to take longer to translate for obvious reasons.
- **Your level of experience and education:** I have seen translators argue that newbies should charge the same as an experience translator because otherwise you are claiming to be less competent. I could not possibly disagree more. If I am hiring, and I have translator A who is less qualified than translator B (i.e. less experience etc.) but they are both charging the same price, I will always go for translator B.
- **Any discounts and surcharges:** I will discuss this in the next step.

Determining specific rates for your language pair

I cannot make a specific recommendation on what you should charge, however I can offer you tools, statistics, and advice. Please note that any rates I use in examples in this book are nothing more than that, i.e. hypothetical examples.

Below, you can find two links that show statistics for the prices charged for different language pairs. You may also find specific recommendations for your languages elsewhere, e.g. organizations in other countries. The first is the "Average rates charged for translations" from ProZ, and it allows searching by language pair and specialization, giving you both per word and per hour rates:

https://search.proz.com/employers/rates?source_lang=&target_lang=&disc_spec_id=¤cy=usd&submit=Submit&hide_covid_19_prompt=1

The second is from TranslatorsCafe. The search box is at the bottom of the page:

<https://www.translatorscafe.com/cafe/CommunityRates.asp>

In the end, you have to research and test the market and see what your clients are willing to pay. Certain agencies are far more price focused than others. Also keep in mind that agencies will usually want a lower price than direct clients, which is fair because they handle a lot of the administration and marketing aspects. My recommendation is to pick something on the low end to begin with. Your direct client rate could be a bit higher, so for example, if you charge 0.1 USD/word from agencies, you might ask for USD 0.13 from direct clients. The important thing though is to start working regularly as soon as possible so as to gain experience and routine.

For proofreading between two languages, the per word rate is often about a third of your translation rate. It should generally come out to the same thing in terms of hourly wage. For instance, I translate an average of 500 words per hour, and I proofread an average of 1500.

For post editing, the rate is often between 60 and 80% of your translation rate. I believe it should be on the higher side of that range, but unfortunately it is often on the lower side.

How NOT to price yourself: The worst advice that I hear repeated over and over on the internet is to: 1. Determine how many words you translate per hour, 2. Determine your expenses and how much you want to be earning per day or month or whatever, 3. Set a per word rate accordingly.

I hope most people can see the absurdity of this advice. It would mean that a slow translator should charge far more than a fast one – essentially asking a higher price due to their own incompetence. Your speed and your earning needs are only relevant in your own assessment of whether you should or should not be a translator. The only factor that should actually affect pricing is whether or not you are offering something competitive which the client is willing to pay. Like with any business, your basis for price setting should be the market and the going rate for similar types of services performed by similarly-qualified individuals.

Step 7: Discounts, extra charges, and minimum fees – yes or no?

This is an element that can complicate pricing a bit. Here are your options:

Discounts for repetitions in a document: It is fairly standard practice to offer discounts for repetitions and partial matches for documents that can be translated with a CAT tool. The CAT tool can analyze the document and tell you how many full matches and “fuzzy” matches there are (to recap, fuzzies refer to partial matches, i.e. sentences that are very similar to something you translated before). Normally, you would use something called a CAT discount grid, which could be something like this:

100% matches and repetitions: 20% of base rate
95-99% match: 33% of base rate
85-94% match: 50% of base rate
75-84% match: 50% of base rate
Below 74%: 100% of base rate

So, if your rate is EUR 0.1/word, you would charge your full rate for new sentences and for matches under 74%, while for 75-84% matches and 85-94% matches you would charge EUR 0.05/word, for 95-99% matches you would charge EUR 0.033/word, and for repetitions and 100% matches you would take EUR 0.02/word.

This is really only relevant with direct clients though since agencies will apply their own discount grid automatically. This, by the way, is something to look out for when negotiating rates since some discount grids are a LOT less favorable than others. For instance, some may pay you nothing at all for repetitions.

Volume discounts: Should you offer discounts for very large documents? There is some merit to this. A 20,000-word document requires a lot less administration than twenty 1000-word documents – each of which require email correspondence, download/upload, invoicing, etc. You also can get into more of a rhythm translating large documents, particularly when the terminology repeats.

For direct clients, I would always offer volume discounts, for instance for texts in excess of 15,000 words. A typical discount might be 5-10%, calculated from whatever rate you would normally charge them for that kind of document. So, if it is a text for which you normally charge direct clients 0.15 USD/word, first you begin by analyzing the document and applying the CAT discount grid. Now, the total price might drop from 3000 dollars to say 2500 dollars due to repetitions and fuzzy matches. Then, you may choose to give them a volume discount of 10% and charge 2250 dollars.

For agencies, it is not that simple because with agencies you tend to have one standard rate. That means that you might be doing a lot of crappy jobs (i.e. difficult texts, short texts, etc.) and your “pay off”, so to speak, is the bigger assignments. Some agencies will not try to bring your rate down, while others will always try. I tend to be a bit more selective here, and I only agree to discounts if I feel like I can get a very nice hourly wage out of the project.

In either case, make sure you don't end up with a huge job that will take you far longer to complete than you estimated – and which you are now doing at a reduced price. Scan the document thoroughly before agreeing. There may be nasty surprises hidden in certain sections. I have certainly blundered this way several times, and I can tell you it is a bad situation to be in. Here you are, stuck with this monstrosity of a text full of difficult terms that you missed during your first glance, and now you also have to reject better paying work because you are busy.

Extra charges: Translators may apply extra charges for rush jobs, weekend/holiday work, documents requiring extensive formatting, document types that are hard to work with (e.g. physical documents – though these are exceedingly rare), handwritten texts that are difficult to read, etc.

As with discounts, extra charges are much easier to charge to direct clients than to agencies. That said, agencies will typically handle file conversion issues, desktop publishing, etc. themselves. If you are expected to perform a lot of work that is not actually translation, e.g. formatting tables and text boxes, it is common to be paid extra. For instance, you might get your normal per word rate for the translation plus an extra X hours (based on the hourly rate you submitted to them) for formatting.

Weekend and holiday rates are another issue where there is little consensus. Personally, I have never charged them, but some translators take very high fees – like 50% extra. That would never, ever fly with my agency clients, so all I can say on the matter is proceed with caution.

Minimum fees: Small files are a pain, and some clients have a lot of them. For instance, I work with one agency where I do a lot of proofreading, and many of those files are 100 – 500 words. It takes me longer to agree to take the job, download the file, set it up, and then upload it after I am done than it takes to actually proofread it. And we have not even factored in invoicing.

My advice here is to charge a minimum rate as a standard, but to let it slide when it comes to regular clients who normally give you proper jobs. They will appreciate it, and you can consider that an investment in your relationship.

Again, there is no consensus on how much to charge. Some translators say it should never be under your rate for 1 hour of work. For example, let's say your per word rate is USD 0.12 and your hourly rate is 45 dollars. You then get a file that is 200 words to translate. Your normal rate would be calculated as 0.12×200 , which comes out to 24 dollars – but since that is below your 1-hour rate, many translators would instead charge the 45 dollars.

Personally, I use half an hour, so in the example above, I would just charge the 24 dollars since that is above the half-hour rate. I work mostly with agencies, and most agencies that I have encountered would not pay a full hour for a very small job. It helps here if the agency has an easy invoicing system which autogenerates invoices for you. That can really make tiny jobs worthwhile.

So again, you need to test the waters a bit. However, I would recommend starting with a very modest min. rate. It can always be changed later.

Step 8: Establishing your expertise and branding yourself

The goal of this section is to give you a set of potential tools that you can use to establish your expertise in the industry and to brand yourself.

I will refer to the items outlined in Step 5 on presenting yourself, so if you are not familiar with that section yet, it might be a good idea to read it first.

References: References are useful but not strictly mandatory, in that only some agencies actually ask for them. There is no question though that having good references, whether on your CV, as ratings on online profiles, or as testimonials on your website, is a massive advantage.

Personally, I always struggled with references for two reasons. First, I truly detest asking for them. Second almost all my clients have been agencies, so it always felt wrong for me to ask for a reference to be used to get work with one of their direct competitors. Instead, I would encourage agencies to test me (see below). Almost all agreed. I also opted to get certified through the ITI in the UK. The certification process required a great deal of references, but these were easier to obtain (or at least they felt easier for me to ask for) because this time I was using them for an independent body not a direct competitor.

Ratings and feedback: Some online translator marketplaces, including the two most important ones, ProZ and TranslatorsCafe, support ratings and feedback from clients on your profile. These can be a good way to inspire confidence in new clients, but they do require proactive work on your part. Even very happy clients rarely leave ratings/feedback on their own initiative.

The best example of how to use this effectively comes from a colleague of mine. His strategy was to build up his ProZ profile and use it in all his applications (as a link in the email, for example). He did so by going after every job within his area offered on that marketplace, no matter how small and annoying, at times even doing tiny jobs for free. Then, after the file was returned and the client was happy, he followed up with a polite request for a rating/feedback. It was never tit for tat, i.e. saying "I will do this for you in exchange for a rating". It was always just a polite request stating something like "If you were happy with my work, could you please leave feedback on my profile [link]". He now has well over 50 positive ratings. That is an enormous amount, and that profile opens doors, instantly establishing trust and inspiring confidence.

Your own website: If you do build your own site, which is something that you should aim for either right away or in the near future, it is important that it conveys the right message. The focus here is on the tangible benefits that you can offer the client, i.e. the problems you can solve for them. You need to show that you have the right expertise to carry out the task, and you need to establish confidence and trust in your abilities.

Your website must therefore address three things:

- The benefits that the customer will enjoy from hiring you: This should be very specific, and it should directly address the customer segment(s) you are targeting. How exactly will the client be better off by hiring you?
- The reason why you are the right person for the job.
- Any information you can provide to establish trust and confidence in your claims, be it testimonials, references, awards, certifications, etc.

Before engaging in something as extensive as building a website, I would highly recommend reading a book on copywriting or taking a short course online. It will help you understand how to write in a way that motivates clients to hire you because I assure you, most people do not know how. Here is a link to a short course on Udemy which will teach you the basics in a few hours:

<https://www.udemy.com/course/the-complete-copywriting-course/>

Translation tests: The testing process is basically where you are sent a sample translation, which will then be evaluated by a translator the agency already trusts. Agencies do this all the time, while direct clients do so less frequently. Generally, this is done for free, though a few agencies do pay you for it. If you are not being paid, the test should not be much more than 250 words or so.

Many translators object to the idea of free tests. My philosophy has been a bit different. I regard it as a marketing expense. In fact, if a potential client posts a really attractive job on one of the translation marketplaces, I will often volunteer a small free sample even if they never asked for one.

Certifications and accreditations: This was discussed in the presentation section, so I will keep this brief. Generally speaking, certifications and official qualifications can be useful as a badge of trust or to be able to stamp and certify official translations. However, they are absolutely not a requirement, and I do not think it should be a focus for most of you in the early stages of your career – in fact it might not even be possible until you can document X number of years of experience.

The system for certification/accreditation also varies greatly from country to country – even as to what the word “certified” actually means. In some places you may have to take a government exam, in other places the system may be far less official. So if this is something you are interested in, you will need to do some research into how it works in your area and also which organizations are actually reputable (there are a LOT of useless, bogus certifications out there). The ATA is the main body in the US, while the CioL and ITI are the best-known organizations in the UK.

Qualifications and education: This too has been discussed previously. Relevant degrees, particularly bachelor and master's degrees are a huge plus. They can be in languages/translation or in any subject with which you are working or planning to work (e.g. law, engineering, IT, medicine, etc.). Relevant courses are always useful as well. Even short courses like the kind you can take on Udemy can be quite useful to round off your skills.

Networking: Networking can take place both online and offline. In addition, it can have two general purposes: the first is to bring you in contact with clients, and the second is to develop a network of peers.

Networking is not necessary as such, in the sense that many translators succeed without engaging in any kind of networking. I was one such translator for quite a while. However, it can be a very valuable tool, and some of the best paid translators I talked to were great networkers.

Online networking is primarily done through social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. This may lead to clients indirectly, e.g. by helping to establish your presence, by making it easier to be found, and by obtaining recommendations from peers. Secondly it can lead to clients directly since jobs are sometimes shared by members of the community or group, members may at times act as outsourcers themselves, or clients may post there directly.

Networking in live events can involve meet-and-greet events held by translation agencies, conferences, workshops, industry-specific events, etc. Basically, you should go wherever you think your potential clients would be, thinking in terms of your specializations and the brand you want to establish for yourself (more on that later in this section).

The art of networking is something well beyond our scope here, but very briefly, what you notice with great networkers is that they think networking into everything. They

maintain lots of acquaintances, they always look for opportunities to develop leads, they give to their network (e.g. by recommending others), and they have their business cards and elevator speeches at the ready.

Publications, videos, blog posts, etc.: This form of marketing serves to establish you as an authority within the industry, generally for one or a few specific specializations, and to attract potential customers (or leads). It may involve publishing an article, writing a blog, posting relevant and insightful things on LinkedIn or Twitter, making instructional videos, etc.

This kind of marketing is called “inbound marketing”, and the idea is basically to generate leads through compelling content rather than traditional advertising. There is an abundance of information available online on this, but one thing I do want to state here is that you must make sure that everything ties together. As I will explore in more detail below under branding, you have to establish a common thread between all the different marketing elements.

A professional approach: This should go without saying, yet it often needs saying nonetheless. There are four quintessential things that practically define our industry:

- Quality – in terms of accuracy, flow, and suitability to the target audience.
- Strict compliance with deadlines.
- Confidentiality – with respect to any content that is not freely available to the public and with respect to sensitive information.
- Data security – This is relevant anywhere, but particularly in the EU in light of the GDPR rules. You should research your local requirements. Very generally, make sure to keep client data on secure, clean systems, never share it with third parties, and delete sensitive data once the project has been finalized.

Apart from the overall quality of the translation, here are some general things to consider pertaining to the above three factors:

Reject any project that is outside your area. There is nothing wrong with doing so; on the other hand, producing a substandard text can ruin your relationship with that client forever and/or affect your payment.

Always keep your promises with respect to your price quote, deadline, and the quality level.

This industry revolves around strict deadlines. Your translation is often part of an ongoing process (e.g. the publishing of a website, the release of important news, documents to be sent to a client or partner, etc.), so if you are late, everything else is delayed as well. Do not be late.

In the event that you find yourself unable to meet a deadline, contact the client immediately. In my work as a proofreader and quality assessor, I have on numerous occasions been waiting for a file to be delivered to me by the translator only to be told on or after the deadline that the file is substantially delayed. There is no excuse for this. In almost all cases, the translator could have informed me or the project manager of this hours before – sometimes a day or more.

Similarly, if you underestimated the complexity of a document and realize you are not qualified or need more time, contact the client immediately. It is better than delivering a poor translation or missing the deadline. I was in this situation once when I stupidly accepted a very technical document without properly examining it. The project manager had labelled the project as “general/slightly technical”, and because I was busy, I skimmed it very superficially. At first glance, it seemed fine. However, when I started, I realized what a mess I had gotten myself into. Every paragraph had some term that required serious research. I contacted the PM later that day, and we agreed to split up the job with another translator and that I could send a list of queries to the client.

Finally, assume confidentiality even if it has not been expressly discussed.

Branding yourself: This is about creating an identity or image for yourself in the industry. It establishes you as an expert in the minds of the clients – the go-to guy/gal for a specific type of translation. It is not enough to slap a few slogans out; you need to have a common thread between everything. Your CV should fit your message, and that message should be reflected in your online profiles, your website, your social media posts, articles, etc. For anything visual, you should also make sure that presentation and appearance are appropriate. For instance, someone specializing in law should have a different website than a translator specializing in literary translations.

Most importantly though, your message should be reflected in your work and your conduct. Too often, I see marketing texts concerned mostly with the fluff – the fancy

words, the beautifully-crafted websites, the lofty promises, etc. That's all good and dandy, and it may certainly get your foot in the door, but if at that point you turn out not to be what you claimed, it's all for nothing. So, keep your promises, conduct yourself professionally, and be the person that you claim to be in your marketing and branding. In the end, clients will come back if you can offer:

- **Consistent quality and subject matter expertise:** Agencies will often assess your work and use some sort of scoring system – which you will not generally be informed of. Direct clients have less formal approaches, but one bad project can be the end of a good working relationship.
- **Compliance with deadlines**
- **Reliability and confidentiality**
- **Flexibility:** Show consideration for the client and the deadlines they need to meet. Sometimes project managers are put in tight spots because another linguist did not deliver or is late with a text you are supposed to proofread. The more flexible you can be, the more likely it is they will come to you next time.
- **Availability:** You can say no to projects, and you can set your own schedule. However, be mindful that saying no repeatedly to the same client will eventually mean that you will no longer be their first choice (or any choice for that matter).

Step 9: Marketing yourself to agencies and direct clients

First you need to understand where to find agencies and direct clients. Agencies are usually easy to find – they are visible on translation marketplaces, sometimes actively posting when they need translators or when they have jobs, and they can easily be Googled. For instance, here is a list of nearly 200 agencies I dug up with a quick search (scroll to the bottom of the article):

<https://www.smartcat.ai/blog/top-100/>

By contrast, direct clients are tricky. You do not know if they require your services, you are not sure who to contact, and they often do not know where to go to find a translator. Some can be found on translation marketplaces and general freelancer sites, but mostly they need to be reached through ads or networking or they need to be attracted through inbound marketing. In some areas, email marketing may be a good option, while in other areas, it is a violation of anti-spam laws – more below.

When I refer to translation marketplaces, I am referring to sites like ProZ, TranslatorsCafe, Translationdirectory, and The Open Mic. By freelancer sites, I mean general sites like Fiverr or Upwork. In the resources chapter at the end of the book, I will include links to a number of such sites.

Agencies

In most cases, you will need to approach agencies, but at times you may also be contacted from profiles you set up online or from referrals from colleagues.

Sometimes, agencies will also post ads for in-house translators/proofreaders/quality managers, etc. That, of course, is no longer freelance work, but if you are interested in such things, then you can apply to those jobs via traditional routes. Here we will focus on how you can land freelance work from agencies.

Email, contact forms, etc.: You can find agencies through internet research, through a list you obtained, or on a translation marketplace. Then, you send them an application email – simple, professional and without too much fluff – as described in Step 5, and you attach your CV.

A few things to keep in mind: First, use your own email domain, i.e. not Gmail or other free email. Too many scammers use those, so it has to be your own. If applying through a translation marketplace like ProZ, you can also use their system.

Second, be specific when you are applying to a specific job post or for a call for translators specializing in a certain domain. Reference the client's requirements in your email and show why you are the right person for the job. When sending unsolicited emails, focus on your specializations, and customize the email to that specific client at least slightly. Do not spam a general email to a hundred email addresses you found somewhere. Check out the agency, determine the right contact person or department, accommodate any contact requirements they may have, and try to determine if they work with your language combinations/specializations fairly regularly. If the agency is very large, it is probably a safe bet, but if it is small, you may very well be wasting your time.

Looking for relevant agencies will actually save you time in the long run. I made that mistake way back when I started. I downloaded some list of agencies from somewhere, and I proceeded to send standard emails off. Some responded and asked me to go through the whole song and dance of signing up (which I will describe below). Turns out though, that these agencies hardly ever had any Danish-English translation, but they were happy to add me to their database just in case. No paid work – or virtually no paid work – came from this approach. But the process certainly took days and days of unpaid work on my end.

Networking and colleague referrals: This aspect was covered in the previous step. I do believe that networking is more important for direct clients than it is for agency clients, where the process tends to be more formalized. However, that does not mean it is not effective. Being at the forefront of a project manager's mind when he/she has to assign a job is very important. This could involve attending a social event held by the agency or simply nurturing a professional relationship over time. Another thing to keep in mind is that project managers may move to other companies, and sometimes they will contact translators they worked with previously. Suddenly, you have an entirely new client.

Colleague recommendations are another possible source of work. One client that I recommended to a colleague of mine at a time when I was too busy to take on new work has been a regular, well-paying client of his for years now. Recommendations and referrals can be powerful door openers.

Online profiles: In the previous step under ratings and feedback, I talked about the way online profiles, particularly with good ratings and feedback, can help establish trust and inspire confidence. There are several places to do this, and I will provide a list in the resources section, but the two most important are ProZ and TranslatorsCafe. Agencies post jobs on these sites, sometimes they call for applications from translators

with a given language combination and specialization, and other times they will contact you directly. In general, it helps to have a complete and professional profile that inspires confidence, to have positive ratings and feedback, and to have a paid membership. I am in no way saying that a paid membership will lead to jobs, but paid members appear first in searches, get to bid first, etc., so it is certainly an advantage.

What you should expect from the agency application process: Some agencies just write your name in a database and save your CV. Others – perhaps most – will want you to sign some kind of contract and other documents. You may or may not be allowed to sign it on the computer, otherwise you will have to print, sign, and scan it. Often, you will also be asked to fill out detailed information on your fields, background, pricing, etc. Some agencies ask for nothing beyond your CV, some ask for references, some for tests, and a few ask for both references and tests.

Direct clients

Contacting direct clients takes more of an effort, but the pay is often better. Let me just say that unless you already have contacts, I would generally recommend working with agencies to begin with. It is simply easier since it leaves much of the marketing, file format issues, etc. to the agency, so you can focus on learning the trade. If you do go after direct clients, here are some options and considerations:

Who are your ideal direct clients? In most cases you will want to go for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) working within your areas. Of course, some specializations, like marketing and business law, are relevant to most companies, but other areas like pharma or electrical engineering are only relevant to specific firms.

The reason why I recommend SMEs and not large companies is that large companies often have complex projects that require multiple languages, specializations, etc. For that reason, it is easier for them to work with agencies, which although more expensive, can manage these complex projects. Alternatively, large companies may have their own in-house translators.

Adwords and social media advertising: Advertising online does work, but it can be quite expensive if you do not know what you are doing. I have used it with decent results, but I used to be certified in both Adwords and Microsoft's advertising platform (i.e. ads on Bing).

I will say this, if you want to consider advertising in this way, take an online course. Without understanding the mechanics of the bidding system, the importance of how to formulate your ad, the importance of the landing page, etc. you will likely hemorrhage

money. You can find courses through Skillshare, Udemy, etc. You can likely also find things on YouTube, but I would definitely recommend a more formalized course which covers all aspects methodically from A to Z. Advertising this way is not extremely difficult, but you do need to put in some hours of learning and possibly some effort into developing a good landing page for people who click you ads.

Inbound marketing: This is a discipline on its own, so I will keep this very brief. As described earlier, this involves content marketing, including articles, blog posts, videos, etc., designed to establish your expertise and have potential clients find you. For this to be effective, it should show real expertise within a certain area or industry.

Translation marketplaces and freelancer job sites: Direct clients do post jobs on such sites (to which I will provide links in the resource chapter at the end). Speaking very generally, marketplace sites like ProZ are dominated by agencies, while freelancer sites like Fiverr will be dominated by direct clients. Apart from English sites like Fiverr and Upwork, there will also be local sites in non-English speaking countries. The only problem is that, in my impression, the prices are often really low. The clients posting there often want a cheap solution, and they do not know anything about market prices and what it actually takes to translate a document. Nor do they know how big a difference in quality there can be. Similarly, the sites themselves tend to be frequented by new or amateur translators who price themselves ridiculously low. Still, it is worth checking out, and my impression could be entirely wrong for different language combinations.

Networking and referrals: I have already outlined this in the previous sections, so all I will say here is that networking can be a particularly important tool when getting direct clients. Direct clients often do not know the translation market well, they are busy with other things, and they are likely to go with the person who made a positive impression on them or the person that someone recommended to them. In a Facebook group, one translator shared the insane per word price she was charging her direct clients; clients which she obtained from attending events and networking. It was the sort of price that only someone with zero knowledge of the market could pay, since you could hire three qualified linguists for that rate. Yet, they were paying it.

As I mentioned earlier though, face-to-face networking is not necessarily for everyone, but it is an avenue to consider. This kind of networking starts by asking yourself “where can I run into my potential clients?” Then it involves presenting yourself in a way that fits with your branding and industry – everything from your elevator speech and attire to your business cards.

Online networking on the other hand is easier and less time consuming. Just as an example, if a client posts a job in a Facebook group and asks if anyone is interested, it really helps if you have peers who will recommend you. It instantly gives you a boost relative to anyone else.

Business directories: Check out your local options. For me, the results have been minimal, but there have been some results. The plus side it that it is usually fairly easy, so you might as well cover your bases.

Testimonials: These are a great way to generate trust on your website. Business review sites where customers can leave testimonials and ratings can also be useful. This is obviously not something you will have at the beginning, but it is something to focus on going forward.

This can involve sending an email to clients you work with. Make sure your request is appropriate, i.e. that you have a good, well-established working relationship with that client. Do not ask for a testimonial after completing a short 300-word translation for a new client. Probably the easiest way to approach them is at the end of a successful project as a request in the last email. Do not be pushy or demanding, just send a polite request that they can be free to reject.

Email marketing: This is a very tricky category because the anti-spam rules vary extensively from country to country. For instance, in the EU you may not send emails without obtaining prior consent under penalty of severe fines, which generally makes this form of marketing unviable. In the US, email marketing is possible, but the email must conform to certain requirements. You should research the specific rules in your country and make sure that they are current. As a starting point (but by all means do not rely solely on this information), here is the Wikipedia entry for spam legislation in different countries:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Email_spam_legislation_by_country

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): SEO is about getting your site to appear at or near the top of the search results in search engines such as Google for specific keywords and keyword phrases.

Let me preface my somewhat controversial recommendation here by saying that I actually worked with SEO for years. I know what it takes to do SEO, and when I see it recommended for translators, I am nearly 100% certain these people have no clue.

SEO is not about slapping some keywords here and there and optimizing your site a bit. That stuff may have worked years ago, but not today. Not for well over a decade. SEO is a slow, long-term process. It does involve some on-site optimization, but that's just an enabler, i.e. it will not generate any results on its own. The results come from long term content building on your site and on external sites; content that must resonate with users and generate quality inbound links, social media shares, traffic, etc. An SEO campaign is extremely time consuming and can take 6 months of work to show results. It can take a year or more if the keywords are competitive, and in some cases, it will show no results if you are up against established sites that also know what the hell they are doing.

Does this mean SEO is an ineffective discipline? Not at all, but it is not a magic pill. It is both time consuming and costly because you have to keep producing good content several times per week, you have to promote it, actively engage in quality link building, etc. You also have to keep up to date with good SEO practice and bad SEO practice, the latter being defined as something that will either generate no results or impose a penalty on your site – and Google changes those rules all the time.

Is it useful for translation? I don't think so, and let me tell you why. Try open Google and punch in some translation-related keywords. For example: "translation", "translation from Spanish to English", "English translations", etc. Try it in whatever languages you work with. How many times do you see Google Translate and other machine translation among the first results? I am talking now only about the organic results, not the paid ads that Google places at the top or side of the page.

For my language combination, machine translation results often take up the first half or more of the page. You are never, *ever* ousting those with your SEO, so in effect, you are fighting for the bottom of the page. Meanwhile, companies using Adwords (Google paid advertising) will appear at the top of the page. This is why I believe that SEO is not cost-effective in most cases.

Step 10: Financial matters, taxes, and business registration

Unfortunately, being a freelancer comes with a lot of unpaid work. Apart from sending emails back and forth – usually the biggest time waster – you also have to write invoices, do your accounts, and submit and pay our taxes. Once you have full-time work, you should probably expect around 1-2 hours of unpaid work every day. Of course, you also save some time by not having to actually go anywhere, so how you put all that together is up to you. Personally, I average 9 hours a day, with 7-8 hours of paid work and 1-2 hours of administrative tasks.

Invoicing: Your invoice should include a date, a unique invoice number, the two parties involved in the transaction (including any business registration numbers and so forth), a breakdown of what is being invoiced, the amount charged, the payment terms, and bank/payment info. Invoice templates can easily be found online, and I will link one or two in the resource chapter.

Agencies generally set the rules for when and how you should invoice them. With agencies, you typically invoice after a project or at the end of the month. You might have to submit an invoice you created, or their system might auto-generate an invoice which you can save for your records. Make sure you follow their rules to the letter. Agencies typically pay projects 30 to 60 days after they were invoiced (usually 30).

Payment is most often done by bank transfer or Paypal. Paypal is quick, easy, and often with less hassle for international transfers, however you lose out in part due to the unfavorable exchange rates. Even if bank transfer is generally more favorable, you should definitely have a Paypal account just in case.

With direct clients, you normally set the payment terms. I personally use two weeks from the invoice date. The process is otherwise the same.

Late, incorrect, or non-payment: This can be an issue, and it is therefore a good idea to keep track of your invoices. Personally, I have never had an issue with late payment from a major agency, but I have spotted a couple of genuine mistakes where the wrong amount was paid out. From smaller agencies, particularly those based in low-cost countries, late or non-payment may definitely be an issue. This is because those agencies sometimes run on tiny profit margins, so if the client does not pay or is late, the agency is unable to pay.

Also, beware scammers pretending to be clients. Use of free email is a huge red flag. Beyond that, if in doubt, research reviews for that agency, both on Google and on ProZ.

Overall, in my experience, working with agencies is quite safe. Non-payment is probably more of a risk with direct clients, particularly individuals rather than companies. You should therefore investigate the recourse options at your disposal in your country. Typically, one would send a reminder, which may or may not impose an additional charge – although regardless of the rules, it is probably best to just send a plain reminder to begin with. This leads nicely to the following point.

Contracts and prepayment: So, does this mean you need a contract? The answer is yes, but generally the email chain can constitute a contract. However, for this to be the case, you need to make sure that the exchange of emails has all the components that define a contract, including a clear agreement between the parties that indicates that one party has been contracted to perform work for the other. Normally, that is not an issue if you clearly outline all the terms and ask the client to explicitly confirm. Here are two external links discussing the matter, however please do research your local rules:

<https://www.icaew.com/archive/library/subject-gateways/law/legal-alert/2018-02/case-law-court-confirms-emails-can-create-legally-binding-contracts>

<https://www.hg.org/legal-articles/at-what-point-does-an-email-become-a-binding-contract-46423>

Another possibility is to ask for prepayment or partial prepayment. It is very unlikely that agencies will accept this, but it is something you might consider with direct clients. Personally, I have only used partial payment on a few occasions and only for large projects.

In any case, make sure you actually know who you are dealing with. If you get a job offer from someone claiming to be Mr. Smith from so-and-so address, but the email is sent from a free email service, how do you know that they are who they claim to be? How can you follow up if you are not paid and no one replies to your emails anymore? The answer is you really cannot know who you are dealing with, so that means that you either need to confirm their identity in some way before accepting the job or you need to ask for (partial) pre-payment.

Business registration and accounting: It is very difficult to give any specifics here since the rules vary country by country. In the US, if I understand the rules, you generally do not need to register as a self-employed person – though there may be advantages to doing so. You can do business as a sole proprietor using your social security number, providing you don't have employees etc. In the UK, I believe you would normally register a sole proprietorship (also referred to as a sole-trader), while in Denmark, where I am based you have to at least register a sole proprietorship company if you earn over USD 7.5k/EUR 6.7k per year.

Tax deduction of expenses is another area that may differ from place to place and from one company form to another. Check those rules as well – don't assume anything.

The specific local rules you need to investigate must answer the following questions:

- Do I need to register my business? If so, when?
- How does liability work for the different registration options?
- How are taxes calculated, when/how do I report them, and when/how do I pay them?
- Do I need to charge and pay VAT? If so, when?
- Do I need to use a professional accountant to do or review my accounts? If so, at what level of income or under what company form?
- What expenses can I tax-deduct?

Chapter 5: A Few Examples

In this chapter, I will present a few examples to show how all of this could be applied in different situations.

Fictitious example 1: Edward the engineer

Edward is from the UK, and he speaks French and English. His background is in engineering, and he has spent years abroad working in France. Edward has always been good at writing, and during his career he worked extensively with developing technical documentation for various systems and devices. He even has some previous translation experience from his job. Now, Edward would like to work from home as a freelance translator.

Edward begins by assessing his situation. He likes working alone, and he has a solid educational background as well as years of experience in a field that is both highly paid and in high demand. Even though Edward has translated before, he was never been paid for it on a per-word basis, so he tries a few test translations to see how fast he is. He realizes that he can translate fairly complex documents at about 250 words per hour, which is kind of slow but acceptable for the types of documents he handles – at least to begin with.

However, Edward also realizes that the requirements his previous employer placed on him with respect to grammar and formulation were not quite as stringent as what he would face in the translation industry. Edward therefore decides to supplement his qualifications by brushing up on his written English skills. He therefore takes an online course and borrows a few books from the library. This is an area he will focus on improving in the initial part of this career.

Edward decides that he will start by offering translation from French into English (UK), since English is his first language. He also offers proofreading and editing and makes a point to involve himself with post-editing as soon as possible.

Edward already has a great PC, printer/scanner, and a fast internet connection. Now, he decides to invest in SDL Trados because he feels it will open more doors than the other tools, particularly in a technical field. He also invests in a good technical online dictionary, basic accounting software, and his own domain (for email and to build a website).

Edward prepares his CV, highlighting his language experience, work experience, and education, and then sets up several online profiles on translation marketplaces. Edward also starts building a website. He has experience with this, so he decides to use Wordpress and build the site himself. In all these endeavors, he focuses on his brand as a technical translator, highlighting all the benefits that a client will receive from his previous work and language expertise, and he establishes trust through testimonials from previous employers as well as samples of his work (taking care not to breach any kind of confidentiality).

Before getting started, Edward researches the rules and regulations for freelancers in his country of residence with respect to business registration, accounting, taxes, and so on. He will work under a sole proprietorship, and he carries out any relevant registrations.

Edward has no contacts specifically in the translation industry, but he does have contacts from his old job. Edward therefore decides on the following marketing strategy:

- He will brand himself as a technical translator, listing several specializations within engineering and IT.
- He prepares all his marketing materials, including his website and his LinkedIn profile, so that they communicate the same message. He already has a strong presence on LinkedIn, so he will focus on that to begin with. Edward plans to start a blog with articles concerning his areas of specialization and then share and promote this content on social media and by being active on similar sites and blogs.
- Edward has a strong network from his previous work, and he decides to maintain and build it both offline and online so as to develop leads, which should result in some high-paying jobs.
- He is also able to get several strong references from previous colleagues and managers, which he can use in his applications or as testimonials on his site.

- Edward also starts contacting agencies, a few at a time, taking care to personalize each email. He starts with some of the largest players, but also takes time to research smaller agencies that work with his languages. Because of his background and recommendations, Edward can begin by pricing himself in the mid-range with agencies and even higher with his direct clients.
- In time, Edward's goal is to obtain a translation degree or certification from a major recognized body.

Fictitious example 2: Jenny the business student

Jenny is American, but she comes from a bilingual household and speaks English and Spanish fluently. She has just finished her bachelor's in business administration and would like to pursue a career as a freelance translator.

Jenny assesses her situation. She is used to having a rich social life, so working alone may be an issue, but she figures she can make it work. Her qualifications include a strong education but little experience. Jenny is an avid reader and a strong writer, but she has little in the ways of demonstrable qualifications.

Jenny tries some test translations within different business subjects and finds that she can usually work at around 400 words per hour, which is great. Her language skills are very good, and she is truly bilingual, but her written English is better. Jenny decides to start by brushing up her already strong English grammar skills and to translate mainly from Spanish into English (US). However, she also plans to take easy jobs the other way if they are offered to her, and she will devote part of her time in the first year to bring her written Spanish up to the same level.

Jenny plans to market herself as a business specialist. She can easily work with subjects like marketing, HR, and business law, but the finance she studied during her bachelor's degree is not quite enough. Since finance is an area that can generate a lot of business, Jenny drops by the business library at her university to sharpen her skills. She also finds and downloads translations online, including annual reports and financial statements, to see how other translators do it.

Jenny realizes that she is not extremely qualified relative to her competition, so she decides to price herself on the lower side of the spectrum. She has a computer, but it is a small laptop, so she decides to invest in a wide monitor so that she can work more easily with multiple documents. Money is tight, so Jenny decides to rely on a free CAT tool, at least to begin with. She saves her one-month free trial of SDL Studio in

case a big project pops up that requires that CAT tool specifically. Jenny's other investment is in a paid email service and in paid memberships to ProZ and TranslatorsCafe.

Jenny investigates the rules in her country regarding registration, taxes, accounts, etc., and she finds an Excel sheet template for her accounting.

Jenny does not have much of a network, nor does she have access to any direct clients. So, initially she decides to focus on agencies. Her marketing strategy is as follows:

- Jenny wants to market herself as a business specialist translator, working with subjects like marketing, finance, and business law.
- She plans on sending solicited and unsolicited, personalized applications to relevant agencies, both in English and Spanish-speaking countries. She also signs up to a number of freelance job sites in different countries.
- Jenny cannot provide references, so instead she asks the agencies to test her.
- Jenny plans to apply to almost any job within her area listed on ProZ and TranslatorsCafe, even if the project is small and poorly paid. In some cases, she might even do a few freebies. Then, she plans to follow up successful projects with a polite email asking for a rating and feedback. The goal here is to develop one or more profiles that she can use to open doors to better-paying clients.
- Jenny also plans to be active on social media, particularly Facebook, where she joins a community of linguists.
- She plans to build a simple website using Wix in the near future, but this is not one of her primary goals right now.
- Jenny's immediate goal is to develop her skills as a translator, gain ratings and references, bolster her CV, and generally establish herself in the industry. This will enable her to charge more in the future and will improve the chances that other forms of marketing will succeed.

Sample project flow 1

1. An agency posts a job on a translation marketplace. It involves the translation of 3000 words of legal text.

2. Your profile is set to notify you of relevant work, and since you work with law, you receive an email notification.

3. You respond to the job post, highlighting your relevant qualifications and any specific information that the client asked for in the job ad. You also attach your CV and indicate your rates.
4. The agency replies and tries to negotiate the price.
5. Once/if you agree on a rate and deadline, you are sent a purchase order (PO). Most agencies will send you a PO to confirm a project.
6. This project is to be carried out using Memsource, and the agency provides you with login information. The account gives you user access to the CAT tool for the duration of this project.
7. You carry out the translation but come across several areas where the source is ambiguous. Not wanting to introduce an error, you therefore send a query to the agency, which then forwards it to the client.
8. The client responds and clarifies the dubious segments.
9. You complete your first draft, proofread your translation, and run the quality assurance function (which in Memsource includes the spellchecker function), which finds a few consistency issues and a spelling mistake.
10. After fixing the file, you return it to the agency by finalizing it in Memsource.
11. Later, you send an invoice for the job together with a polite request asking for feedback on your profile on the translation marketplace.

Sample project flow 2

1. You are contacted by a project manager from an agency you work with. He asks if you are available for a large 12,000-word file due in three days. He indicates that there are a number of fuzzy matches and repetitions, such that the actual workload (once all the partial matches have been factored in) corresponds to 10,000 words. The term he uses is “effort words”, indicating the equivalent workload for you.

2. You respond and say that you are only partially available during this time and would need at least four days.
3. The PM asks you to keep your schedule open while he quickly contacts the client to see if an extension is possible.
4. The client agrees, and the PM gives you the go-ahead.
5. Since you indicated that you work with SDL Studio, you are sent a Studio package as well as the PO. This package is then opened in Studio, which unpacks it into a number of folders containing the previous translation memory (TM), the source and target files, as well as a glossary.
6. Since there is a glossary attached, Studio will present you with any terminology as it occurs. So, if a segment has a word that the client included in the glossary, the accepted translation for that word will pop up in a window at the top-right of the CAT tool whenever you are on that segment.
7. As you translate, the CAT tool also draws on the TM and presents you with a number of fuzzy matches for different segments. These partial matches in the TM stem from previous translations performed by other translators for this same client.
8. Once you are done, you proofread your file and run the quality assurance tools. They spot a number of issues you missed, including some errors with numbers and some blank spaces. Then you run the spellchecker.
10. Once the file is ready, you right click on the file name in the CAT tool and select "create return package". The CAT tool then automatically packs everything into a single file containing your translation, the updated TM, etc., which you return to the agency as per their request.
11. You do not invoice this project right away because your agreement with this agency is to invoice at end of month.

Sample project flow 3

1. A direct client contacts you via the contact form on your website. They are looking for a translator to handle the translation of a catalogue from English to Finnish (your

primary language pair). The subject is automobiles, which you listed as a sub-specialization.

2. You reply saying that you would be happy to help. However, before you can quote, you need to see the text (or at least an extensive representative sample) plus information including: 1. The deadline they had in mind. 2. Whether they expect you to handle the formatting/layout of the catalogue. 3. The number of words if they expect a lump sum bid (which they usually do). 4. The type of document you will receive.

3. The client provides you the catalogue in Word format, which any CAT tool can handle, and here you can see that it is 8000 words. They want you to mirror the layout (something your CAT tool should do automatically), but the final formatting etc. will be handled by them. The deadline is in two weeks.

4. You now prepare a quote. Direct clients typically want to know the total price, nonetheless it is probably a good idea to break down the price for them in the interest of transparency.

After running the CAT tool analysis using whichever CAT tool you have, you may determine that there are some internal repetitions in the file. Using whatever discount grid you normally use (see Step 7) in combination with your standard rate, you arrive at the total price. However, the deadline is favorable, and you would like to attract more work from this client, so you could consider a discount.

The math might look like this: Hypothetical per word rate for direct clients and technical translations: EUR 0.17/word. Preliminary total is EUR 1,360, but after applying the discount grid it might drop to EUR 1,200. You would then send the client the breakdown of the price (if relevant indicating that it does not include VAT – depending on the rules in your country). You might then state that due to the favorable deadline, you will charge them a flat rate of EUR 1,100 for this job.

5. You outline all the terms of the agreement in your email and ask the client to confirm the project. They reply and confirm. There is no PO sent because direct clients do not normally know anything about POs. However, the email confirmation should suffice, and you are dealing with a company using its official email so it should be fine.

6. You open the file in your CAT tool. Your intention is to create and maintain a TM specific to this client to be used on all future projects. The advantage of doing so is that: 1. You ensure consistency across the all future documents. 2. It will hopefully be quicker to translate future documents as the TM grows, allowing you to either earn more money or to offer the client a lower price.

7. During the course of the translation, you run into difficulties with certain terminology. You are able to resolve most issues through online research, including some reverse image search, as well as through your online network – taking care not to divulge sensitive or confidential information. However, there are still two terms left, so you contact the client, presenting a few options that you think might be right.

8. Fortunately, the client knows the right terms due to their industry expertise, and you can finalize the translation.

9. You return the file and invoice the project.

10. After working with the same client a number of times, you could consider asking for a testimonial for your site.

Chapter 6: Tips, Tricks, and Pitfalls

This chapter consists of a collection of advice based on my own experience as well as conversations with other established translators. Some of these may have been mentioned in the text above, but most will be new.

Productivity and research

Proofreading your translations: Every document should be proofread after you translate it. However, if you have the time, do not do it right away. Put it aside for a while – generally the longer the better. This will let you proof it with a fresh set of eyes, and you will be far less likely to miss errors.

For most projects, I proofread my documents twice, once focusing on meaning, where I check the target against the source, and once on flow, where I read through the target document out loud. When you read things out loud, it is much easier to spot formulation issues.

Research: Researching terms is how you will probably spend a good deal of your time. Apart from learning basic Google operators, which allow you to be very specific in your search, you may also benefit from familiarizing yourself with image search and reverse image search, i.e. where you search using an image rather than text and are shown other places where that image appears (links provided in the resource chapter).

For instance, this sort of thing could be useful if you are trying to find the translation of a component in a machine and all you have is a picture from a brochure which is in the wrong language. That component manufacturer might be advertising their products in different languages using the same image, so by searching for the image, you could find documents in your target language.

Another resource at your disposal is to ask colleagues and other experts you might know. ProZ, TranslatorsCafe, and Facebook groups are good options. Again, always remember the issue of confidentiality.

In some cases, it may also be possible to call institutions and other organizations and ask them about official terms that they use.

Finally, another tool you have at your disposal might be the client – which is something I touched upon in the examples. In some cases, the client will know how certain industry-specific terms are used in other languages. You can submit questions to the client, directly or through the agency, but do so very sparingly and preferably no more than once per project. Asking for a client to confirm one or more possible translations is better than just handing them a bunch of terms you do not know. You can also submit notes with your translation at the end of the project, highlighting any areas where there might be uncertainty or where you had to make certain choices. Here too, be brief and stick to what is strictly necessary. However, any real issues should generally be resolved, if at all possible, prior to the submission of the file.

Your home office: You need to set up your own space. We are all different here, but just keep in mind that this is where you will be spending the better part of the day. You need to be comfortable, you need to have the right equipment (and this is where I am a big advocate of using one or two large monitors), and you need to be relatively undisturbed. The latter is particularly relevant if you have family members who stay home.

Pricing

Focus on actual earnings rather than per word pay: Sometimes translators focus too much on their per word rate and too little on what you would actually be earning. On translator forums, I see people stating things like: “I will never work for under XX per word”. Yet, an easy document at a low per-word rate can earn you more money than a hard document at a high per-word rate. For example, early in my career, I was offered a relatively simple book on a business subject I am extremely familiar with. I cannot mention what it was because the book was translated through an agency, so I cannot take credit. However, I was offered a low per-word rate and, being in dire need of work at the time, I took it. It was a good decision. I was able to put down a first draft almost as fast as my fingers could type. Even with final proofreading, that meant

that I could finalize (i.e. translate and proofread) over 6000 words in a normal 8-hour workday. Turned out to be one of my better paying jobs.

Don't rush poorly paid jobs: Sometimes you can end up in a nasty circle if you price yourself too low. The low per word price encourages you to rush things. Rushing things results in poor quality. Poor quality then prevents you from being able to ask for a higher price.

The promise of better pay for future projects: Beware this one. Sometimes, agencies that have no intention of ever paying your rate will ask you to take a project at a lower rate – just this once. Your first clue is if they complained about your rate when you signed up and have never offered you a job at that price. They might say something like, “Our budget is really tight on this one, can you make an exception?” In my experience this will rarely, if ever, lead to better paid work.

Now, this is not the same as being asked to take a job at a lower rate by a project manager you know and have worked with before. Whether you choose to accept something like that is up to you, but at least you have the knowledge that this agency has been paying your regular rate thus far.

Per-word rates for proofreading texts you have not seen: Some clients may ask you to commit to proofing a text before it is ready. Normally, whether translating or proofreading, you should see the text first. One exception is if the client has arranged to have two linguists on a job and needs to have the proofreader ready to double check the file as soon as the translator is done with it. In such cases, the fairest thing is to be offered a per-hour rate because then you will simply get paid more if the quality is poor.

It is important that you understand that accepting a proofreading task at a per-word rate or a fixed lump-sum rate prior to it being ready is a bit like rolling the dice in a casino. I am not saying you should not do it; heck I've rolled those dice more times than I can count, with extreme results on both ends of the spectrum. You just need to know what you may or may not be getting yourself into.

In the worst case scenario, some cheap agencies will get an unqualified translator to translate a file for peanuts and then pay a qualified linguist to proofread and fix the file – and of course they will try to get that linguist to commit to a set price beforehand.

Dealing with clients

Complaints and praise: Unfortunately, praise is rare in our business. It certainly does happen, but in many cases, happy customers stay quiet and return for more work. Unhappy customers on the other hand rarely stay quiet. Hopefully, you will encounter very few complaints in your career, but I can almost guarantee that you will face some. Of these, many may be unjustified, while a few may be spot on. Just remember to deal with each of them professionally and politely, and if you were in the wrong, apologize and offer to fix things for free.

Being proactive: This continues directly from the point above. It follows that you need to contact your happy customers for referrals, testimonials, and recommendations. Nothing will happen if you do not take the initiative.

“Expert” clients: Sometimes you get clients who are fairly competent at the target language but think they are experts. This is very common for my language pair, since Danes are usually good at English.

Fortunately, it is a rare occurrence, but it can lead to some frustrating exchanges. I've had to explain that terms I used were not literal translations of Danish terms, but that the Danish terms themselves had been “stolen” from English. Similarly, a colleague of mine had a long argument with a client who insisted that he had misused the word “headquarters” – because, he said, their company only had *one*.

Another possibility is the accusation that you translated too literally. When I started, I had the philosophy that if the sentence structure works equally well in English, I should keep it. Then, on a few occasions, I had the client tell me that they felt the translation was too literal. The thing is that a literal or very close translation should only be an issue when it does not read naturally in the target language. However, to avoid this, I sometimes move things around just a little bit, even if it makes no difference at all. That actually works.

Free email: I have said it before, and I will say it again – do NOT use free email when contacting clients.

Missed deadlines: Also something that deserves repeating. Do not miss deadlines. If something truly exceptional has happened and you realize you will miss a deadline, contact the client immediately. The earlier the better. Apologize, let them know it is an exceptional case, and tell them by how long you will be delayed.

Also, for heaven's sake be accurate when you estimate a delay. I have seen translators give absurdly wrong estimates here. I was once kept on standby as proofreader for a translation that was supposed to come in at 15:00. The deadline came and went, and at 15:30 I shot the project manager an email. The project manager eventually got a hold of the translator after an hour of trying and was told that the file would be delayed another hour. Wanting to be flexible and to maintain good relations with the agency, I said I would wait. I think the file was eventually ready the next day.

Chapter 7: External Resources

As the final chapter in this book, I have included a collection of useful external resources below. Some have been mentioned before and some have not. Please note that the lists are not exhaustive and that there will undoubtedly be a lot of resources in other languages. For instance, the best specialized dictionaries I know between Danish and English are on Danish sites not English ones.

With this, I have nothing more to add than to wish you the best luck possible in setting up your business, and I genuinely hope that the information presented here will help you to that end.

English language resources

- Lexico (Oxford-powered dictionary): <https://www.lexico.com/>
- Cambridge dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>
- Merriam-Webster dictionary: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>
- Thesaurus.com: <https://www.thesaurus.com/>
- Rhymezone (rhyming dictionary – very niche, but it literally saved me once): <https://www.rhymezone.com/>

Translation terminology research

- Glosbe – the multilingual online dictionary: <https://glosbe.com/>
- EUR-lex (allows multilingual search of EU documents): <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/>
- IATE – European Union terminology: <https://iate.europa.eu/home>
- Wikipedia: <https://www.wikipedia.org/> - this is relevant because Wikipedia often has pages translated in different languages. You can see the languages of each individual article in the column on the left.
- MOZ – Google search operators: <https://moz.com/learn/seo/search-operators>

- Google reverse image search tutorial: <https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/1325808?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en>
- TinEye reverse image search: <https://tineye.com/>

Inexpensive or free online courses

- Udemy: <https://www.udemy.com/>
- Coursera: <https://www.coursera.org/>

Some major CAT tools

- SDL Studio Freelance: <https://www.sdltrados.com/products/trados-studio/freelance/>
- Wordfast: <https://www.wordfast.net/>
- MemoQ: <https://www.memoq.com/>
- Memsource: <https://www.memsource.com/>
- Free CAT tools: <https://www.translationdomain.com/software/5-free-cat-tools-to-use-in-2019/>

Lists of translation agencies

- From Smartcat: <https://www.smartcat.ai/blog/top-100/>
- From ProZ: <https://www.proz.com/business>

Translation marketplaces

- ProZ: <https://www.proz.com/>
- TranslatorsCafe: <https://www.translatorscafe.com/>
- Translation Directory: <https://www.translationdirectory.com/>
- TM-town: <https://www.tm-town.com/>
- The Open Mic: <https://theopenmic.co/>

General freelancer sites and online agencies

I should warn you that some of the options in this section may be quite poorly paid. They may also have dubious quality reputations, but that's more an issue for the client.

By "online agency" I mean agencies where the entire process takes place through their system. You typically sign up, apply and perhaps take some tests, and then you work exclusively through their online system. Regular agencies obviously also have a strong online presence too, but there you tend to work through a project manager.

- Fiverr: <https://www.fiverr.com/>
- Upwork: <https://www.upwork.com/>
- SmartCat: <https://www.smartcat.ai/>
- Gengo: <https://gengo.com/>
- Onehourtranslation: <https://www.onehourtranslation.com/>
- Textmaster: <https://www.textmaster.com/>

Miscellaneous

- MS Office invoice templates: <https://templates.office.com/en-us/invoices>
- Paypal: <https://www.paypal.com/>
- Dropbox: <https://www.dropbox.com/>
- 7Zip (a free and very good compression and decompression program): <https://www.7-zip.org/>
- Skype (sometimes required): <https://www.skype.com>
- Search operators: <https://moz.com/learn/seo/search-operators>
- Audacity (free, professional audio recording and editing): <https://www.audacityteam.org/>

