

Choosing and Using a Business Translator

Business Information Factsheet
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Introduction

The services of a translator are an essential requirement for anyone who is planning to export or import, or set up an overseas operation for their business. Translators convert written texts from one or more different languages into their mother tongue for clients from a range of sectors. Some translators also provide proofreading and editing services.

Although some of the legal and other documents used for business transactions may be in English, it is likely that a number will be in foreign languages. Having an accurate translation of such documents is key to trading abroad successfully.

This factsheet explains the services provided by a business translator and provides guidance about how to find one. It outlines what should be expected from a business translator and provides an indication of the fees they are likely to charge. It also includes sources of further information and support.

Business translation services

Translators usually only translate into their native language, and often specialise in one or more technical fields such as law or engineering. They generally have extensive knowledge of the culture, attitudes and practices of the country or countries in which their specialist languages are spoken.

Business translation services are provided by both translation agencies and freelance translators and some of the advantages and disadvantages of each are as follows:

- Translation agencies offer editing, proofreading and sometimes additional services such as typesetting. Complex large-scale projects, involving translations into numerous languages, may require a co-ordinator and a team of translators. Agencies usually have good resources and a pool of freelancers, who can turn around large projects more quickly than an individual translator and in theory offer the assurance and stability of a reliable organisation.
- Freelance translators are often engaged by translation agencies to work on large-scale projects or are directly commissioned by clients. Dealing directly with an individual translator offers the advantage of a personalised service. Experienced freelance translators can often respond more quickly to urgent deadlines or changing requirements than agencies.

Finding a business translator

Business translators can be found in the following ways:

- By approaching professional bodies that represent translators and typically list their members on a register or in a searchable online directory. Professional bodies include:
 - The Association of Translation Companies (ATC, www.atc.org.uk), which is a professional body that requires certain minimum standards from its members. It also maintains a register of associate members and an independent arbitration service for disputes between member and non-member organisations and their clients.
 - The Institute of Translation & Interpreting (ITI, www.iti.org.uk), which keeps a register of translators who have demonstrated a clear minimum standard of experience and academic qualifications. The online ITI directory can be searched free of charge.
 - The Chartered Institute of Linguists (IOL, www.iol.org.uk), which keeps a register of translators who have demonstrated a clear minimum standard of experience and academic qualifications. The IOL online directory can be searched free of charge.
 - The International Federation of Translators (FIT, www.fit-ift.org), which lists translators of less widely-spoken languages.
- By reviewing specialist directories listing translators such as:
 - www.translationdirectory.com.
 - www.proz.com.
 - www.traduguide.com.
- By searching professional networks such as LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) to find translators who are promoting their service to other business and professional LinkedIn users.
- By contacting translators who are promoting themselves (or conversely, by advertising available translation work for translators) via freelance marketplaces such as Guru (www.guru.com), and PeoplePerHour (www.peopleperhour.com).
- By attending local business networking events. For example, local Chambers of Commerce (www.britishchambers.org.uk) provide members with regular opportunities for networking with a wide range of other business members and professionals such as translators.
- By contacting the British Embassy in the relevant country to find a translator who can translate less widely spoken languages. Go to www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations for a directory of British Embassies.

London has a high concentration of translation agencies and offers a broader range of languages than are available elsewhere in the UK. However their charges often reflect the premium location of these agencies.

What to look for when choosing a business translator

Translators are not legally required to have any specific qualifications in order to provide a business translation service. However, they are usually qualified to degree level in one or more languages and, in practice, post-graduate qualifications in translation are also essential. Translators must also be able to write fluently and accurately, and in a range of different styles, in their native language.

The International Permanent Conference of University Institutes of Translators and Interpreters (CIUTI) can advise on the status of qualifications. Go to www.ciuti.org for further information.

Experience carries considerable weight. Translation agencies often demand evidence of three years of documented work before hiring a translator. Legal, scientific or financial translators should be qualified or at least experienced in their specialist field.

Asking for references may help to assess the satisfaction levels of a translator's previous customers, and translators who are members of a professional association will have to meet specific standards in order to maintain their membership.

Chartered Linguist status is awarded to translators or interpreters who are members of the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL), Institute of Translation & Interpreting (ITI) or the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIIC). Applicants for Chartered Linguist status must be in regular professional practice, undertake continuing professional development and have knowledge of the relevant languages to degree level.

Although not a legal requirement, as best practice the agency or translator should have professional indemnity insurance cover.

Translation charges

There is generally a relative scale of translators' charges according to language (one typical scale is given below). In the UK translation is cheaper from and into European languages and more expensive from and into African and Asian languages.

Most translators and agencies in the UK charge by the word for European languages (quoting rates per 1,000 words) and by the character for South East Asian languages. Proofreading should be included in the price. However, on its own proofreading will usually be charged by the hour.

Expect to pay at least £60 to £100 per 1,000 words for translation into and out of the common European languages, rising to £120 to £200 for some African and Asian languages. For the purpose of pricing, agencies tend to group languages according to the scarcity of translators. The following scale gives an idea which language groups are lowest in price (Group 1) and which are highest (Group 3). (However, some agencies group languages slightly differently between categories).

Group 1: Arabic, French, German, Italian, European Portuguese and Spanish.

Group 2: Albanian, Bulgarian, Czech, Croatian, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, Greek, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Maltese, Norwegian, Polish, Brazilian Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbo-Croat, Slovak, Slovene, Swedish, Turkish and Welsh.

Group 3: Afrikaans, Basque, Bengali, Mandarin and Cantonese Chinese, Finnish, Gaelic, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Icelandic, Japanese, Kazakh, Korean, Kurdish Sorani, Persian, Punjabi, Somali, Thai, Ukrainian, Urdu and Vietnamese.

Fees rise for urgent jobs, documents involving heavy formatting, websites and specialised work. As a general rule, an agency will charge around 20% more than a freelancer.

Contractual terms of engagement

As best practice, clients who intend to use the services of a business translator should be provided with the translator's standard contractual terms and conditions (Ts and Cs) of engagement along with a quotation specifying their fees for the project before the assignment is commenced.

The ITI has published a set of model terms of business for translating and interpreting services, which may be useful for anyone who is choosing and using a business translator and can be viewed at www.iti.org.uk/about-industry/advice-buyers/155-model-terms-of-business.

Hints and tips

- Before engaging an agency or translator they should be asked to provide references, a client list and examples of previous work.
- Clear terms and conditions (Ts and Cs) of engagement and a quotation for the fees relating to the assignment should be provided by the translator before the assignment is commenced.
- Translators for less commonly spoken languages can be found via local universities, the embassy of the relevant country or the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London (SOAS, www.soas.ac.uk).

Further information

BIF202 Import Duty and Taxes
BIF208 A Guide to Export Documentation
BIF235 Government Support for Exporters
BIF238 A Guide to Methods of Entering Export Markets

Useful contacts

The Association of Translation Companies (ATC) is a professional group that represents translation services as well as providing information for translation purchasers.

Tel: (01273) 676777

Website: www.atc.org.uk

The Institute of Translation & Interpreting (ITI) is a professional association for translators and interpreters. It provides a directory of translators and interpreters and guidance about assessing translation needs.

Tel: (01908) 325250

Website: www.iti.org.uk

The Chartered Institute of Linguists (IOL) is a membership organisation that represents the interests of professional linguists. It also provides a Find-a-linguist directory.

Tel: (020) 7940 3100

Website: www.iol.org.uk

The International Federation of Translators (FIT) is an organisation that represents associations of translators from across the world. It provides a list of translators located in 55 countries.

Website: www.fit-ift.org

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