

The MITA

Reader

A newsletter for the DFW-area Metroplex Interpreters and Translators Association



www.dfw-mita.com

MITA Christmas party— December 12!

Page 2



Making it work: a Freelancer's Challenge

Part I

*By Carol Shaw
Page 2*

Upcoming Events

Page 4

Calendar, page 4

The MITA Reader is published for the benefit of MITA members and friends. Submissions are welcome and should be submitted to the editor, Carol Shaw, at shawtrans@gmail.com. Articles must be of interest to a broad range of translators and/or interpreters and may not be political in nature.

Annual MITA Christmas Party

December 12, 7:00 p.m.

The Wilson Carriage House
2922 Swiss Ave.
Dallas, TX 75204

Cost: FREE for members and one guest
(Members: please take this opportunity to renew your 2010 membership.) (New/former members are welcome to join/renew their membership at this event!)

Please bring a side dish/dessert to share, preferably of your native country. We will assign the side dish or desert based on alphabetical order of last names. MITA will be providing turkey and ham, as well as sodas for our party. You are welcome to bring your own wine.

***If you have not yet RSVP'd for this event,
please contact Norma Pace, normapace@sbcglobal.net***

Making it work — A freelancer's challenge

Part I

By Carol Shaw

Before joining the world of freelance translators and interpreters, I spent 16 years in corporate international sales and marketing. Talk about a different world! It was great trading in my business suits for big shirts and blue jeans. The morning commute to my office in the corner of the living room is stress-free and the only time I have to deal with traffic is on the rare occasion that I accept an early-morning interpreting assignment (i.e., anything before 10:00 a.m.)

A few weeks into my new life, I ran into my old boss and mentor. He had become an independent consultant the year before. Maybe it was force of habit from all those years he helped guide me – and keep me out of trouble – but he took the time to offer a few pointers about working on my own. They were good ones. Over the past few years, other experienced translators and interpreters have added to that store of knowledge. Five main marketing tips stand out to me:

a) Business plan

When I first went freelance, the idea of no longer having to prepare data for business plans made me positively giddy. That didn't last very long. Come to find out, a business plan for freelancers is absolutely essential. You need to know:

What, specifically, do you want to do? Many of us do a little bit of this, a little bit of that, whatever comes our way. That's like hopping into a canoe and hoping the river current carries us to our destination. What do you do best? What do you enjoy most? Where do you want to be in five years? Only take "off-track" assignments if they do not

interfere with work inside the focus you have defined for yourself.

What do you need in order to get there? Additional training? Materials? Tools? Every successful business – and each of us runs a business – will have continuing operating expenses. These are not “taking away” from your income: they are necessary for you to generate an income.

How much will you charge? Basing your rate only on “industry standard” is not a wise option. For one thing, have you tried to pin down an industry standard lately? There isn’t much of one! We cannot set industry rates or pressure anyone to conform to our rates, or we risk charges of price-fixing. (It’s happened before; no kidding.) More importantly, industry standard is only one factor in setting a price. We’ll look at pricing more in Part II, in the next issue of The Reader.

How much, or little, are you willing to work each day or week? Do you have time restraints or other commitments? Take these factors into account when setting up a realistic business plan.

b) Preparation

Simply put, marketing is the art of making your skills available and attractive to someone who needs them. To do this, you need to do some homework. The time invested, though, pays great dividends.

Identify what you bring to the table. Be realistic. Remember, your potential clients have a choice of whom they use for their translation or interpreting services. Let’s say that Fred has retired from a civil engineering company and is now going to fulfill his lifelong dream of becoming a translator. That extensive engineering knowledge may provide a great focus for his translation business.

Identify your preferred market. Who do you want to work for: agencies, direct clients or both? large companies? non-profit organizations? There are pros and cons to any type of client. Think it through. You need to make sure that the pros outweigh the cons in your particular case.

Identify your targets: the people to whom you will offer your skills and time. For example, if Fred has instead decided to specialize in construction and would prefer to work only for agencies, then he must identify agencies whose clientele includes construction companies. The process is not unlike a courtship, without the eventual in-laws. It takes research. It takes ingenuity. It takes patience.

c) Contact

When you talk or write to a possible client (after doing your homework), you must be prepared to answer one specific, often-unsaid, question: *why, out of all the translators and interpreters available, should the client choose you?*

Be concise. Avoid abstracts. Offering a client “promptness and accuracy” is about as helpful as the meteorologist saying that there will be “weather”. Present your skills and experience in a manner that relates to the client’s needs. (Example: “A two-step translation and revision process help ensure a high degree of accuracy for your texts.”).

Be honest. Back in my corporate days, I could always tell when someone was stretching the truth in their resume. Translating a two-paragraph flyer on bathroom cleaners does not make you an expert in industrial chemicals. You can (and should) draw on experience: just do so honestly. For instance, if you want to work with a company that handles household chemicals, your initial pitch might include, “...I have experience working with numerous product instructions, such as bathroom cleaners...”

And most importantly:




Be customer-oriented. Imagine that you need your teeth cleaned and decide to try the new dentist down the street. As you sit in her office, she walks in, she says, “I graduated at the top of my class; I have been a dentist for 20 years. I have drilled teeth, filled teeth, removed them and crowned them. And today I’m going to give you the braces you always wanted.”

Far from being impressed, you would feel alienated. What did she do wrong? She failed to find out what your need was. She focused on herself. And she made assumptions about you.

Perhaps the most important rule of marketing is: never *assume* what the client’s needs are. Research, ask questions, and *find out* what the client’s needs are and then *customize your services accordingly*.

Next issue: Pricing and Follow-through!

December 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	 12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	 25	26
27	28	29	30	 31		



Federal holidays:

December 25: Christmas
 January 1: New Year's Day
 January 17: MLK Day

Events.

February 6: General MITA meeting (Taxes for Translators and Interpreters)
 March 4-6: ATA Spanish Language Division conference (www.atanet.org)
 March 13: MITA Q&A session in preparation of ATA certification exam
 March 14: ATA certification exam hosted by MITA

January 2010

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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31						