Quick Start Guide

8 steps to a marketing plan for your freelance translation business
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Tess Whitty 2015
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If you are like me, you probably want to spend your available work time on tasks that generate revenue, and focus on what you love and do best - i.e., translating.

Although you might dislike selling or marketing, failure to devote any time to marketing your freelance services can easily drive you into the infamous feast and famine cycle. In order to create a steady income and to find the jobs and clients for whom you enjoy working, and who pay well, you should market your translation services regularly. This is most easily accomplished through the use of a marketing plan such as that outlined in this eBook. If you follow these steps, you will not feel like you are “selling” something, but rather that you are allowing prospective and current clients to become aware of how you can benefit them.

Developing a strong marketing plan presents the opportunity to look professional, build client relationships, brand yourself to your ideal clients, and essentially to grow your freelance business overall. Building strong marketing strategies requires attention to many details. In this eBook, I will take you through this process step-by-step so that in the end, you will have an actionable marketing plan to work with/to work on – a plan that is concise and easy to follow.

Successful marketing plans start with a strong foundation and goal-setting. I use a tool called SMART goals and will describe that process in Step 4. I will show examples from a freelance translator’s point of view and will use them to define goals and to break them down into smaller goals, leading to an achievable end goal.
This eBook provides quick and efficient steps to create and implement your own marketing plan. A strong marketing plan will allow your freelance business to grow and increase your ability to compete with other freelancers in your area of specialization.

**STEP 1: DEFINING YOUR CURRENT SITUATION**

In order to create a marketing plan that works, you need to have a good grasp of your current business situation. For instance: are you a new freelance translator or an experienced one? Who are your customers today? Who are your competitors, and what differentiates you from them? These are just some of the questions you should ask yourself as part of a market analysis, which is a great starting point to any good marketing plan. The analysis process does not need to be difficult. Simply answer the following questions to create a foundation for a solid plan.

What do you want to achieve? You should have a clear understanding and definition of your goals. For example:

- Move from part-time to full-time translator status
- Procure better clients and higher pay
- Become known for your expertise
- Add more clients
- Develop a new specialization
What is your market niche? A well-defined niche must fit both your professional specialty and your target market (e.g., English>Swedish software localization for software companies, or French>English translation for lawyers). A well-defined niche will help make your marketing more cost-effective and your business more profitable. Having an area of specialization also makes it easier for clients, prospects, and those who refer your services to understand and remember what you offer.

Who are your customers today, and who are your future prospects? Are they translation companies, localization companies, or end clients? Are they mostly located in the U.S. or in another country? Are they all within a certain industry?

Who are your competitors? Do you consider translation companies or other freelance translators to be your competitors? Where are they located? It is good to know as much about the competition as possible so you can determine what makes you unique. Keep in mind that competition is not a war; I have started fruitful collaborations with several of my competitors.

What are your unique selling points? Are you the only translator within your niche in your city, state, region, or are you one of several? Does your time zone work to your advantage in communicating with clients in other countries? What about your availability, speed, and tools? Does your professional background or education make you different?
When you think about your freelance translation business, are you sure you are marketing to the customers you would most like to attract? Are you happy with your current customers? If not, you might benefit from creating an avatar or profile of your ideal customer. By creating a profile of your ideal client, you can pinpoint your target audience’s needs. You will find out what your prospective clients look for on your website and can develop more targeted communications and marketing. If you improve your understanding of your ideal client, and then develop your marketing material and communication so that it speaks the same language as your ideal client, you could significantly increase your chances of getting discovered and possibly hired.

1. FIGURE OUT YOUR CUSTOMER’S PROFILE

Think about your business and the best customers you currently have or have had. Based on this, you can ask yourself questions to help you find prospective clients that are similar to your best customers and target them in your marketing. I have created a checklist of questions you can ask to get to know your ideal customer and create a customer profile or avatar for your translation business.
SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

- What industry is your customer in?
- Where is he or she located?
- How big is the company in terms of revenue and number of employees?
- What is the customer’s role in purchasing decisions?
- What services does your customer request, and why?
- What are the customer’s demographics and interests?

Try to be as specific as possible and write it down. You can even draw a picture of your ideal customer.

2. UNDERSTAND YOUR MARKET

After you have answered the questions above, you will have developed a clearer picture of your ideal customer. Now you can examine your market and determine why this customer is buying your services. You can find the answers by asking yourself the following questions:

- What are your customer’s problems?
- How can you help your ideal customer?

Asking these questions will facilitate your ability to identify a particular value you may be able to provide to your ideal customers.

3. MAKE SURE YOUR MARKETING REFLECTS YOUR IDEAL CUSTOMER

It is not enough to simply identify your ideal customer and how you can possibly help this customer. It is also crucial to take action and ensure that your marketing is targeted toward this ideal customer. Make sure you keep this ideal customer and how you can help him or her in mind when you create or edit your website, in writing your emails, letters and brochures, in keywords for your website, in your LinkedIn profile, and in your phone scripts.

As a freelance translator, the only way to stay competitive is to define your niche market and speak directly to the customers in it. When you customize your marketing
to speak directly to your ideal customers, they will recognize you as the person they want to work because they will connect with you and feel as though you understand them. You speak the same language.

**STEP 3: DECIDING WHICH SERVICES TO OFFER TO HELP YOUR TARGET CLIENTS**

Freelance translators are all selling services. What services do you provide, and how are they different from what others offer? For example, do you work in an uncommon language combination, have unique knowledge of both the source and target market, or extensive professional and educational marketing experience? The important thing is to define your service offering, and define it well. You must identify how you can help your clients. Bear in mind that translation is not the only service a language professional can offer. A professional translator can offer different services in different fields. Your focus should remain on the issues that your ideal target clients need help with.

**HERE ARE THE MOST COMMON SERVICES TRANSLATORS CAN OFFER THEIR CLIENTS:**

- Translation: The communication of the meaning of a source-language text by means of an equivalent target-language text.
- Editing: Correction, revision or adaptation of a text for publication or presentation.
- Proofreading: Reading a proof copy of a text in order to detect and correct errors.
- Interpreting: Facilitating of oral or sign-language communication, either simultaneously or consecutively, between speakers of different

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• Website localization: Localizing websites requires adapting them to local
culture and language in the target market.
• Software localization: Adapting computer software to different languages and
regional differences.
• Voiceover or dubbing: A production technique that uses a voice that is not part of
the narrative in a radio, television, film, theatre, or other presentation.
• Subtitling: Translating text versions of dialogue in films and television
programs that are displayed at the bottom of the screen.
• Transcription: Converting spoken-language source audio to text. It can also mean
converting a written source to another medium.

Which of these services do your ideal clients need, and which do you enjoy doing?
Focus on one to four of these services and become excellent at delivering them
and providing clients with these particular services. Avoid trying to be a jack of all
trades by offering all of them. You will not only spread yourself too thin, you will
also be unable to provide the best possible job for any one service.

STEP 4: CREATING SMART GOALS FOR YOUR MARKETING

The business strategy and marketing world has great
concepts for creating good goals, called SMART goals.
SMART goals are Specific – Measurable – Attainable –
Realistic – and Time-bound. Use them to define your
goals and to break them down into smaller steps leading
toward the bigger goal. Doing so will aid your progress
toward your goals and assist with actually attaining them.

Start by defining your vision for your freelance translation
business. When you have clarified your vision, you can
set more specific goals and break them down into steps.
Create your vision by answering the following questions:

- Where do you want to be in three to five years?
- Who will your customers be?
- How many customers do you want?
- What will you be known for?
- How much do you want to earn?

Now that you have your vision, you can create SMART goals.

**SPECIFIC**

If you can make your goal specific, you have a greater chance of achieving it, since it becomes tangible and easier to understand. To make a goal specific, ask yourself the following questions:

- Who: Who is involved?
- Where: Is there a location for achieving the goal, such as a website, online, in your town, in another country?
- When: Set a time frame for meeting your goal.
- Why: Specific reasons for or benefits of accomplishing the goal. If you do not know why you want to achieve a goal, the goal is not important to you.

Example: Instead of saying “I want to get more clients in 2014,” you can make it more specific by changing it to: “In June, I am going to use LinkedIn to start following and creating interactions with five companies that I would like to work with, in order to gain more clients in 2014.” Or perhaps, “in May I will contact 10 new agencies that seem like a good fit for me, based on their payment practices, specializations and locations.”

**MEASURABLE**

Make the goal measurable by finding criteria to measure. Measuring your goal will help you to see results and make it easier to continue working toward that
specific goal. To determine whether your goal is measurable, ask yourself some of the following questions:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?

For example, in how many days, weeks, or months do I want to achieve the goal, how many companies will I contact, how much money do I want to earn? How much time will I set aside to collect data or contact a certain number of potential clients? How many new clients do I want to obtain or how many new projects do I want?

If your goal is too unrealistic and difficult to reach from where you are today, you will not be motivated to work toward it. This is where breaking down a goal into smaller goals really helps. You can attain almost any goal if you break it down, plan your steps, and establish a time frame for performing those steps. Goals that may have seemed unrealistic and unreachable eventually become attainable, not because you have set smaller goals, but because you can move toward them step-by-step and expand to match them.

You can identify an attainable goal by answering the following questions:

- How can the goal be accomplished?
- Can I achieve this within a certain time frame, with the resources I have?

For example, I would like to earn a million dollars a year and only work 20 hours a week, but I know that is not realistic, at least not based on my current situation. Instead, I can focus on earning $80,000 to $100,000 per year by working 40 hours a week, of which perhaps 30-35 hours are hours I am actually earning while the rest are focused on marketing and administrative work. I divide my clients into direct clients and agencies and determine the share of my business each category currently provides, and the share each will provide in a year.
RELEVANT

For a goal to work for you, it must be relevant for your own business. We are all different, and so are our translation businesses; your goals should consist of those that further your business and that you are willing and motivated to work toward. If you set a goal that you do not care about, or one that you do not think is important for your business in the long run, you will not have the motivation to attain it.

If you can answer yes to the following questions about a goal, you know it is relevant for you:

- Does this seem worthwhile?
- Is this the right time?
- Does this match the work I want to be doing?
- Am I the right person to do it?

For example, a relevant goal for me would be to hire an accountant to outsource my taxes and accounting, because I am not good at doing it myself and not motivated to do it. Accounting takes up too much of my time that I can otherwise spend translating. If I only wanted to earn money, I would also not care about goals that will not directly produce money, such as blogging, article writing, volunteering in associations, etc. However, these activities are part of sharing my passion for the profession, of giving back, and ultimately, they motivate me in my work.

TIME-BOUND

It is important that your goal is time-bound; otherwise, it is too easy to put it off for later. This part of the SMART goal criteria is intended to prevent goals from being overtaken by day-to-day work. Set a deadline and work backwards in small steps to create a time frame.
A time-bound goal will usually answer the questions:

- When will I achieve the goal?
- What can I do six months from now?
- What can I do six weeks from now?
- What can I do today?

For example, I usually plan for a year ahead, with long-term general for three to five years, and then I break down annual goals into monthly goals and sometimes even weekly tasks. Granted, I cannot always achieve all of them, and may have to adjust scheduling and goals, but they motivate me to work on further developing my business.

I hope you have found these examples helpful. Take an hour or two to answer these questions for your particular goals. Doing so will help you set better goals and make them easier to reach.

**STEP 5: CREATING A BUDGET FOR YOUR MARKETING**

Freelance translators are used to starting and maintaining their businesses without having to make any big investments. While your marketing does not have to be expensive, it is beneficial to decide how much money you are willing and able to put into it before you get started. Integrating marketing strategies is a worthwhile investment. It is easy to get carried away, but on the other hand, if you invest nothing, the results are usually modest.

Define a marketing budget, stick to it, and break it up into years and months. Social media also offers plenty of low-cost or potentially free marketing channels.
DEFINE YOUR MARKETING BUDGET BY ANSWERING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- How much money are you willing or able to spend on marketing?
- Do your tactics fit your budget?
- How much can you set aside yearly and monthly for marketing?
- How much time can you set aside? You also need to budget your time.

You have to invest in your business and marketing, or as they say: “Scared money makes no money.” It is important to look professional in your activities; use professionally-created business cards rather than free ones, and invest in your own domain name. In order to achieve your goals, you also have to invest in them.

STEP 6: DEFINING YOUR MARKETING TACTICS

Next, create a master list of marketing actions that you should take in order to grow your business. This master list should contain every task – big and small – that you must complete. Prioritize all the actions you need to take and estimate approximately how much time you need to spend on each one. Finally, put them into a calendar of activities you can follow weekly and monthly. If a certain action requires long-term effort, break the tasks into milestones and mark the milestones on your calendar as well.

EXAMPLES OF MARKETING STRATEGIES OR METHODS ON WHICH YOU MIGHT FOCUS:

1. Create a multilingual website in your language pairs to improve your online visibility. A website allows clients to come to you rather than requiring you to seek them out. You can create your own message and make a professional impression. You can also show samples of your work and give potential clients
an easy way to contact you. There are many free hosting sites with website templates, so there are no reasonable excuses for not having a website.

2. Focus on inbound marketing (customers finding you instead of you finding them) through your website, LinkedIn profile, profiles in translation directories, etc.

3. Write press releases and submit to free press release sites (e.g., www.freepress-release.com).

4. Write and publish articles related to the translation and interpreting industry. You can also publish your writing on Ezine Articles (ezinearticles.com) and use file sharing sites such as Scribd (www.scribd.com) or SlideShare (www.slideshare.net) to post articles or presentations you have created.

5. Network both online and offline. You can network online with fellow translators or your prospects through LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and many other forums. You can network offline at branch expositions, chamber of commerce events, conferences, etc.

6. Ask for referrals and recommendations from your existing clients. Keep regular contact with them to see if you can offer any other services to them, and update them on your latest projects, courses, and specializations.

7. Become involved in your local translation chapter and national translation associations. Try to contribute in any way you can by volunteering.

8. You can advertise in translation magazines or use Google Ads, but these can become quite expensive. You can create brochures with your company information and send them to prospective clients or display them in prominent places such as embassies, chambers of commerce, and professional industry conferences.
9. You can focus on inbound marketing, making sure that you have a good marketing platform such as a website, LinkedIn profile, profiles in translation directories, etc.

10. Research target clients to create a list of people to contact directly.

11. Call potential customers to find out how you can help them, and tell them about the services you provide.

12. Send direct mail to potential direct clients.

13. Research new agencies to work with and contact them by their preferred method.

14. Social media – use social media accounts to find and connect with potential clients. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+.

15. SEO and keywords – use SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and identify the ideal keywords to use on your website. Using keywords promotes site traffic by improving the listing for your business on search engines like Google and Bing.

16. Develop new marketing materials:
   Remember that all of your marketing materials should be short and to the point, as well as directly targeted at and customized for the prospective client. In addition to telling prospective clients who you are, what you do, your competitive advantages, and your specialization, your marketing materials should also answer the following potential questions from clients:
   
   - Why would I hire you?
   - How can you make me successful?
   - What value can you provide?
Can you explain how my bottom line would be affected by not using your service, e.g., for translating my website?

Make a list of the activities from the preceding list that you want to focus on. These can change from month to month, depending on your situation, if you have a lot of clients to focus on already, or if you need to fill your pipeline with new ones. Some months you may merely need to do maintenance work and follow-ups.

**STEP 7: SCHEDULING YOUR MARKETING ACTIVITIES**

Once you have decided on your primary marketing activities, break them down into monthly and weekly activities. Set aside half an hour every day, or a few hours once a week, for these activities. Schedule this very important time for marketing and boosting your business.

A marketing calendar can keep you on track and help ensure that you are taking advantage of every marketing opportunity without lapsing in your efforts. With its help, you can rest assured that your planning, budgeting and staffing are addressed. This alone could save you hundreds, if not thousands of dollars annually.

**HOW TO CREATE AND USE A MARKETING CALENDAR**

Marketing calendars can be created to address your specific needs. Most marketing calendars break a year down into weeks and address the marketing activities that will take place each week. A calendar will be most useful if it is specific, spelling out individual promotions or events. I've personally found it best in my experience to include the marketing cost for each event and the results from that event. Doing this makes it easy to see, at a glance, which events and strategies were productive and on target. This will help you to plan future marketing activities.

Here is an example of a marketing calendar, created by Laura Lake from marketingabout.com:
I suggest using an online calendar such as Google Calendar, which connects to your Gmail account. You can schedule goal deadlines and/or meetings with prospective clients as constant reminders and overviews of when you want to complete certain tasks.

An online calendar is also a great platform because it allows you to look at previous months and years to observe the progression of your freelance business over time.

After you schedule the goals you want to accomplish in the time you have allotted yourself, add more goals and tasks to achieve as your freelance business takes off.
Here are some organization tools to consider:

- Stay organized with Google Calendar and Google Apps
- Stay on track using time-management tools such as Toggl
- Share files, media, and documents with Dropbox
- Capture good ideas using Evernote
- Manage social media accounts using Hootsuite

**STEP 8: TRACKING AND FOLLOWING UP**

Your marketing plan must include a benchmark that you start from and statistics that you will use to measure the plan’s success. For example, track your income, number of clients, number of visitors to your website, and number of recurring jobs from existing clients. When a new client contacts you, always ask: “Where did you hear about me/us?”

Research shows that 80% of your marketing is going to waste, so you had better identify the 20% that is working (Pareto’s 80:20 Rule in Marketing, by Dave Chaffey, at smartsinsights.com).
1. Track your finances by using the report functions in your software:
   
i. What was your annual income for each of the last three years, and what do you want it to be?
   
ii. Which single client generates the most income?
   
iii. How many clients generate the majority of your income?
   
iv. What are your expenses?

2. Track your marketing campaign by comparing how many customers you had before and after implementing your campaign; how much your online presence has increased; how many people have viewed your materials; and how many prospects are calling or writing you back.

3. Track your online presence with tools such as Google Analytics to identify the number of visitors to your website and/or blog, their locations, how they found your website, etc.

4. If you send direct mail to prospects, follow-up is imperative. Wait a few days or a week, then send another e-mail or call to make sure your prospects received your information. Ask if they have any questions. If they are not interested or have no immediate need for your services, try again in four to six months. Keep yourself and your business offerings on their radar.

5. Follow up quarterly on your goals. Are you achieving them or do you need to adjust them?

One of the best follow-up activities is to contact your current clients and/or previous clients that you have completed projects for in the past. Ask them for feedback on the work you completed, and, if possible, find a way to publicize positive testimonials to potential future clients.
Here are a few questions to elicit feedback from your previous or current clients:

- Are you happy with the work I did?
- Did I accomplish what you wanted me to do?
- Is there another service I could provide to your company? What is it?

Businesses want to know they are getting an expert freelancer for their projects. Positive feedback from your current and previous clients can encourage a potential company to hire you and your freelance business.

**CONCLUSION**

Developing a marketing plan is nothing more than setting goals and making a to-do list to get you there. Anyone can write a short, easy and functional marketing plan. The most important actions are following through, setting goals, and ensuring that your marketing tactics are working after you have implemented them. What if your plan is not working? Change it, adapt it to new circumstances, and keep the original goals for your business alive.

**BONUS MATERIAL**

I have created a template to make it easier to create your own marketing plan, based on these steps. You can download it in Word format here:

   **Marketing Plan for Freelance Translators – Tess Whitty ©2015**

Do you have any questions? Feel free to contact me at tess@marketingtipsfortranslators.com. I would also love to hear if this guide has helped you. Best of luck and I look forward to hearing from you.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tess Whitty has been a successful freelance translator and entrepreneur for more than 10 years and owns the company Swedish Translation Services. Her educational and professional background is in marketing, and she is passionate about sharing her knowledge with other freelancers in the form of presentations, training, mentoring and consulting. She is also the author of *The Marketing Cookbook for Translators*, a useful guide with easy-to-follow recipes for marketing your translation services and achieving a successful freelance lifestyle. Tess also hosts the award-winning podcast *Marketing Tips for Translators*. For more information, and to connect, go to [www.swedishtranslationservices.com](http://www.swedishtranslationservices.com) or [www.marketingtipsfortranslators.com](http://www.marketingtipsfortranslators.com).

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