

#### Abstract:

Most of us know that we should have a marketing plan for our small businesses, but how do we create one targeted specifically to our industry? This article will cover the elements of a marketing plan, such as objective; product/service; unique selling points or benefits; market and segmentation; competition; customers or prospects; which media to use and how to track your marketing plan. Specific examples given are targeted and adapted to the translation industry from the standpoint of an independent contractor.

#### Bio:

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## Creating a Marketing Plan for Freelance Translators: A Practical Guide

By Tess Whitty

In order to create a marketing plan that works, you need to know where you **INSERT EM DASH** and your business **INSERT EM DASH** are today. 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 need to ask as part of a market analysis, which is the starting point of any good marketing plan. The analysis process does not need to be difficult. Simply answer the following questions to create a good foundation from which to build a strong plan.

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

- Move from part-time translator to full-time.
- Procure better clients/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 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. Remember 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 in your niche in your city, state, region, or one of several? Does your time zone work to your advantage? What about your availability, speed, or the tools? Does your professional background or education make you different?

## Elements of a Marketing Plan

Using the information you gathered during the initial assessment of your services, it is now time to formalize an action plan that will serve as the basis of your overall business strategy.

**1. Identify an Objective:** You already started to define your objectives in the market analysis. In your marketing plan you can split those objectives into long-term goals (e.g., Where do I want my business to be in five years?), and then break them down into annual or even monthly goals. Doing so will allow you to define the main purpose of your marketing plan. For example, perhaps you want to increase sales by 25% within a few years, or maybe your goal is to have translated 1.5 million words for 30 of your ideal clients, earning \$500 a day and working less than 30-hour weeks, in three years' time. Whatever you decide, conduct an inventory of the benefits or competitive advantages on which you will focus to achieve this purpose.

### 2. Identify Strategic Marketing Goals:

- **Define and identify your prospects/clients.** In order to find your ideal clients, you need to know their needs, demographics, behavioral characteristics, and where and how to find them. How do you do this? Conducting market research, browsing search engines and directories (even the *Yellow Pages*), networking both online and offline, and attending events hosted by trade associations and your local chamber of commerce are useful resources for learning about prospects/clients.
- **Attract and win over your ideal clients.** There are a number of methods to attract and win over the types of clients with whom you would like to work. Some of these include sending direct mail to companies or agencies, filling out online applications to translation agencies, registering on translation forums, and joining translation/interpreting associations.
- **Work to retain clients.** Customer care is the most important marketing tool to help you keep clients and attract new ones. Always do your best job and treat your customers professionally and respectfully. Study your clients and see how you can help them. Keep in touch with your customers, including thanking them for payments, sending holiday cards, and providing them with updates about your company, tools, and schedule. Cultivate and reinforce both personal and professional trust.
- **Increase your revenue with your most strategically important current clients.** By being the best resource possible and by staying in touch with clients, you can potentially create more jobs for yourself. As a bonus, if clients trust you and the quality of your work, they may not be as price-sensitive.

**3. Identify Communication Goals:** What do you want to achieve with your marketing communication?

- Create positive opinions/perceptions where there is none among your audience (establish yourself as the expert).
- Reinforce positive opinions/perceptions where they already exist (remain the expert).
- Change negative opinions/perceptions into positive ones. One way to change attitudes is to do anything to remedy a bad situation among your target customers.

How can you achieve all of this? Communicate directly with your client, but do not nag. Instead, try to solve a problem or offer a solution.

**4. Identify Financial Goals:** How much do you want to earn, and how much do you want to work? Here are a few tips:

- Remain confident in your abilities and do not lower your rates.
- Convince your prospects that you offer something unique and are worth the price they are paying.
- Make sure all of your “defining and identifying” activities are results-oriented. For example, identify 20 prospects in one month through search engine research, online business networks, and trade publications.

Track your finances by using the report functions in your software to answer these questions:

- What has been your annual income for the past three years, and what do you want it to be?
- Which client generates the most income?
- How many clients generate the most income?
- What are your expenses?

**5. Identify Your Product or Service:** Freelance translators are selling a service. What services do you provide and how are they different from what others offer? For example, do you work in an uncommon language combination, do you have unique knowledge of both the source and target market and extensive professional and educational marketing experience? The important thing is to define what your service is, and define it well. You need to discover how you can help your clients.

**6. Identify Your Market Niche:** This is the point where you think about the target market for the niche you defined during the initial market analysis. Remember that your target market might be different from your current market. Perhaps you want to find more direct clients instead of translation companies, or focus on a specific country or industry. Will your marketing plan focus on a new market? Research that market, reach out to that market, and follow up and get results.

**7. Identify a Marketing Budget:** Freelance translators are used to starting and maintaining a business without having to make any big investments. Your marketing does not have to be expensive either, but it is beneficial to decide how much money you are willing and able to put into marketing before you get started. Marketing is a worthy investment. It is easy to get carried away, but if you invest nothing at all, the results are usually also 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 free, marketing channels.

**8. Identify Your Competition:** Your competition in your target market is usually the same as the competition you defined during your initial market analysis. Again, you should decide what makes you different from them. What benefits can you provide? How are you *amazing*? For example, you are proficient in four types of computer-assisted translation tools. That is amazing!

**9. Identify Your Customers and Ways to Stand Out:** Build a database of your current customers and add as much information as you can. For example, list how long you have worked for them, the number and types of projects you have done for them, their payment practices, and customer size. Build upon this database and keep in touch with your current clients. Use a content management system or customer relationship management program to help you keep track. Another way to make a favorable impression on clients is to write good out-of-office auto-responder messages to alert clients to your changing schedule. Send reminders of availability to all your favorite customers. Also, to stand out, write personal handwritten and hand-addressed notes thanking clients for their business.

**10. Identify Your Prospects:** Based on market research, create a list of prospects, that is, your ideal clients for whom you do not yet work. These can be direct clients for whom you have to use direct marketing. Direct marketing has to be very specific; show that you know the customer and can solve a problem for them. Customize each letter to each customer. Network with prospects online through social networks. Network with people who could link you to prospects, such as other translators, satisfied customers, friends, and social media contacts. You should have a professional-looking, proofread résumé, business cards, and e-mail templates set up so you can answer the most common questions from prospective clients quickly. If you want to work for more translation agencies, follow these steps:

- Find a list of translation agencies. A good source is the ATA Membership Directory. Others are translation portals like TranslationDirectory or ProZ.
- Go to [www.paymentpractices.com](http://www.paymentpractices.com) and check the ratings for the agency.
- Google the translation agency and visit and study its website. If it looks like a good fit for you and accepts applications, you can apply via the preferred method of the agency. Many agencies have application forms online or contact info where you can send your résumé.

Remember that all of your marketing material should be short and to the point, as well as targeted and customized for the prospective client. Aside from telling the prospective client who you are, what you do, your competitive advantages, and your specialization, your marketing material should 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 will be effected by not, for example, translating my website?

## Media Campaign

**Generate Publicity:** The following are a few ways you can generate publicity about you and your company:

- Create a multilingual website in your language pairs to improve your online visibility. A website allows clients to come to you, instead of you to them. You can create your own message and you look professional. You can 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 not to have a website.
- Write press releases and submit to free press release sites (e.g., [www.freepress-release.com](http://www.freepress-release.com)).
- Write articles to publication related to the translation and interpreting industry. You can also publish your writing on Ezine Articles ([ezinearticles.com](http://ezinearticles.com)) and use file sharing sites like Scribd ([www.scribd.com](http://www.scribd.com)) or Slide Share ([www.slideshare.net](http://www.slideshare.net)) to post articles or presentations you have created.
- Network both online and off. Online, you can network with fellow translators or your prospects through LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and many other forums. Offline, you can network at branch expositions, chamber of commerce events, conferences, etc.
- If you do not want to have your own blog, participate in other translation blogs.
- Ask for referrals and recommendations from your existing clients.
- Become involved in your local translation chapter and national translation associations. Try to contribute in any way you can by volunteering.

**Advertise:** Advertising differs from publicity in that it is content you pay to present. Publicity refers to free content about you that appears in the media (what others say about you). 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 put them out at prominent places such as embassies, chambers of commerce, professional industry conferences.

## Tracking and Follow-Up

Your marketing plan must include a benchmark from which to start and statistics by which you will 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 **[source?]**, so you had better identify the 20% that is working. 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 on their radar.

Also, track your marketing campaign by comparing how many customers you had before and after you implemented your plan. How has your online presence increased? For instance, how many have viewed your material online, and how many are calling or writing you back? Tools such as Google Analytics ([www.google.com/analytics](http://www.google.com/analytics)) will help you identify the number of visitors to your website and/or blog, their locations, and how they found your website.

## Final To-Do List

- Include your contact information as part of your signature on every e-mail. If an agency cannot reach you easily, they will contact someone else.
- Get a smartphone with e-mail. Do not miss a 30,000-word job because you were out buying groceries.
- Include your full name, translation specialization, and working languages on your CV.
- Set aside time to do continuous marketing. Be consistent and persistent.
- Follow up quarterly on your goals. Are you achieving them, or do you need to make adjustments?
- Try to go through all of these steps and collect your marketing information.

## Keep the Momentum Going

After reading through everything that is involved, does preparing a marketing plan for your translation business seem overwhelming? It does not need to be. For example, I have found two examples of one-page marketing plans, which are listed in the reference section below (Jennifer Mattern and Ivana Taylor). Developing a marketing plan is nothing more than setting goals and making a to-do list to get you there. Anyone can write a one-page marketing plan. The most important thing, though, is to try to follow it, set up goals, and go back to see if the marketing is working. If the plan is not working, change it, adapt to new circumstances, and keep the original goals for your business alive.

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