

## Translation as a Business

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CSOFT International Ltd.

*As a leading provider of multilingual localization, testing and outsourced software development for the global market, CSOFT delivers quality and affordable language and technology solutions by combining advanced engineering capabilities, best-of-breed processes, professional project management and in-country linguistic resources around the world.*

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The characteristics of a “good translator” have been repeated many times in many places. Advisors often explain how to translate a contract or operation manual; how to define adaptation; how to recognize a good translation memory (TM) and/or dictionary program; where to find reliable glossaries on the net and how to recognize problematic source files; to weight the number of words in your translation; and how to open a zip file. Consistently reliable quality and efficient use of tools are necessary but not sufficient to become a successful translator.

Unless these things are supported by thoughtful and consistent management, a translator cannot expect more than temporary success. While many translators live under the illusion that as freelancers the only thing they will have to do is translate, a good measure of true success is how well the translator can manage his or her one-person business.

Like it or not, in addition to translating, a freelance translator has to juggle all the tasks needed to keep a business running, no matter what the size. In this regard, there is no difference between Microsoft and John Smith Translations because a one-person venture has to traverse every single step in the “value chain” just like its corporate fellows. It has to establish the business, organize it, and maintain it at optimum operational level.

The freelance translator becomes the production manager, quality controller, operational director, supervisor, sales manager, advertising and PR specialist, IT

director, chief stockholder and board chair all in one. Sometimes the posts even conflict, and short-term interests can be very different.

Most translators dive head first into their companies without any training in the business world. Many go through the steps of getting a freelance operation permit, a computer and a stack of dictionaries, and proceed to bury themselves at their desks translating night and day. They treat anyone who offers accounting or tax advice, advertising recommendations, or chances to register themselves on a website at low cost as an impediment, and consider the effort of doing any of these things a pain in the neck.

However, a freelancer needs to spend a good portion of his or her working time planning, advertising, bidding for jobs, preparing invoices and accounts, and conducting cost calculations, to put a business on track to long-term success. Most translation schools focus exclusively on theoretical information and offer nil in the way of practical tips. So, professionals just entering the workforce have many difficulties to overcome that take away time and energy from the real job. Lack of knowledge about how to run a translation business, the outcome of intrinsic shortcomings in translation courses, is the basic reason for the huge vacuum on the Eastern and Central European language services market. On the one hand, here in Hungary we see a large number of theoretically trained but inexperienced translators hoping in vain to be entered into client databases, while on the other, we have clients unable to find translators to cover their day-to-day capacities fighting bitterly to secure good vendors. Since most specialized translators study translation to supplement a primary course of studies such as technology or law, they tend to treat a degree as a specialist translator as a lifebelt, a second profession to fall back on if they are unable to find a job in their primary field. If worse comes to worst, they can work as freelance translators, they think. Given the *ad-hoc* nature of the choice, most professionals who start businesses as translators have not surveyed the business climate, have not garnered basic information on the language services market, have not mapped out demands, and have no idea about minimum investment costs or, obviously, expected inflow. In other words, they have no idea what they are up against.