A Fresh Look at the Relationship with your Translation Project Manager (PM)

by Caroline King

Advice from a former PM

The Approach – Be Professional

Your CV – no more than 2 pages – should contain language combinations and specialist areas, any TM software, rates and contact details all at the top of your CV. Your PM unsurprisingly does not have the time to read about your entire lifetime achievements: every job you ever did/where you went to primary school (seriously, I got one of those once) in order to find out how to contact you. Be honest – is your CV up to the standard of the translation work you produce? Don't forget to introduce yourself properly in the accompanying email, including the info above. Blank emails go straight into the bin, as do emails beginning "Dear Mr Caroline" or "I translator, I do translation very good." A professional-looking website complete with testimonials is probably your best calling card. Even better, a Proz profile (yes, there are many other translator sites, but this is the biggest and easiest for PMs to use).

The Quote – Be Flexible

Make sure it is very clear what is required for the job – what files they want to receive back, at what time, for what cost – and then make sure you have a contract/purchase order for your work before you begin. You would be surprised at the number of translators that start a job after an initial quote when someone else has actually won the contract. If you do this you will not receive any money and will have wasted your time and theirs. Also, be flexible with your working methods - if you have an urgent job that you know will be proofread at their end suggest sending it in sections to speed up the process, equally if you show some flexibility on your rates you can ask for quicker payment terms at their end. The ability to negotiate strongly will earn you respect.

You got the job! –Be Available

Do not quote on a job then disappear for the next 2 hours - during this time your PM will have decided you are perfect for the job, agreed to your rate and sent you all the files and a contract to then hear a deathly silence (and yes, they've also tried to ring you) - it will be remembered and you will be put down as unreliable and unlikely to receive a juicy file again. This is a common problem. You need to know that PMs do not necessarily go to lunch at a normal hour (or even leave their desk on particularly hellish days). To cover all eventualities it's probably best to get a mobile phone with email capacity (for when you want to pop to the shops in the middle of the day).

Queries and Terminology – Be Proactive

If there are any glossaries/terminology or TM files, make sure you use them – do question any suspect terms. Also make sure that when you say your TM is compatible, that it is compatible – I've opened (or been unable to open) many garbled files with despair... that's another hour or two trying to fix a problem that wasn't there before. For ease – the best terminology queries I have seen are sent in a simple table (please see next page) – allowing the PM to directly forward queries to the client if necessary. However, don't forget many "clients" are marketing managers who have no idea what the file is about or a clue about one or either of the languages involved, they have just been given a file and a deadline from someone else, therefore you, the translator (not the PM or the client) sometimes become the EXPERT (the original writer is often unavailable or unknown). Finally, any terminology/ other questions related to your document should be sent in plenty of time.

Communication – Be Patient

Don't get upset if you do not receive an immediate response – bear in mind that your task is one of many they are handling, perhaps it's even a short section of a much larger file split between a team – they have seen your email and will attend to it as soon as they can.

Foreign word	Suggested translation	Research link	PM agree/other suggestions	Client answer

This advice varies depending on the agency but in general do not ring the PM unless absolutely necessary, equally do not clutter up their IM with idle chitchat or constant questions – if they need you they will ring you. Email is preferred communication as it's all recorded and as clear as possible. Saying that, they do quite like a chat on a quiet day – let them know if you have any good news, but not "why haven't you paid me yet?" (See paragraph on invoicing).

Presentation – Be A Star Pupil

For your gold star please replicate any formatting in the source file in your translation. This is what project managers often spend a lot of their time on and as you see from above, they've got plenty of other things to be doing with their time!

Delivery – Be On Time

This one should go without saying – but here are a couple of reasons why a deadline is there to be respected – and why it's not just a date/time plucked out of the air.

Always submit on time – if your translation is late, this affects the proofreader who was booked for this specific time only, when you're likely to see your edited translation, whether the PM is going to meet the client's deadline, whether the PM will go home on time (not very likely), their mood, and essentially your future income from this agency.

Feedback – Be Professional

Respond maturely to criticism – any minor changes to your work may be down to updated terminology that came to light in the proofreading stage, or a style requirement issued late in the game. As long as you are working in a professional way your translation will be "fit for purpose" and stubbornly defending each change to your work will only annoy your PM. Nonetheless, if the proofreader appears to be a complete hack then your PM needs to know - you may even benefit from receiving work meant for them in the future.

Quality Checks - Be Respectful

At this stage you may get some strange last minute emails from your PM. Sometimes it may sound like they are asking silly questions regarding your translation of various words or layout. This is normal behaviour. Your PM wants to deliver the best work possible to their client, so they have a final look over the document as if they were a monolingual client. "Why has this bullet point disappeared?" and "where have all the commas gone?" are normal questions from a client concerned that they haven't received an exact replica of the source document they supplied. This process can be frustrating but please keep your cool – most likely your PM is bilingual too but doesn't want to change your work without permission.

The Invoice – Be Prompt

The quicker you send it, the quicker they have it and the quicker they can pay you. Also, only send payment reminders after your due payment term/ agreed payment date, badgering a PM for money looks desperate and is also annoying.

Regular Contact – Be Their Favourite

Here's some more news for you – PMs have favourites and they're not afraid to say it. If you follow the advice above a few times, with any luck you will become one of your PM's favourite translators in your language combination and they'll be bombarding you with work until you find yourself having to turn work down. Just don't turn down too much, or you'll find yourself right back at the beginning...

Happy translating!