Survey Results – Executive Summary

In November 2018 I conducted a survey to determine what sources freelance translators and interpreters use to vet potential agency clients and what kind of information they wanted to know about potential agency clients. The results will be used to update my "Ensuring Payment – Before, During and After the Project" presentation, and a more detailed analysis will hopefully be published in a professional journal.

Findings

Sources of information

Payment Practices was found to be the primary source for information about potential agency clients with 42.5%, narrowly edging out the Blue Board at 41.5%. Of the nine other sources of information listed, only one – Unacceptable Translation Rates Naming and Shaming Group (UTRN&S) – received more than 1% of the votes with 1.8%. Among the "other" sources listed, forums provided by major professional associations (ATA, ITI, SFT, BDÜ) as well as "colleagues" and "fellow translators" received numerous mentions.

The Blue Board was a clear winner for the 2nd choice source of information about agency clients with 38.1%. Interestingly, "none" came in 2nd place with 29.9%, Payment Practices was 3rd with 21.5%. UTRN&S, Zahlungspraxis, and TC Hall of Fame & Shame all received about 10%.

Desired information about agency clients

Note: Questions about desired information about agency clients and reasons for not working for a particular agency excluded rates as a consideration. Respondents were asked to assume that their desired rates were acceptable.

When asked the single most important thing that respondents wanted to know about a potential client, 49.5% selected reliability of on time payment . The ease of the working relationship came in 2nd place at 19.7%. The second most important piece of information was closely divided between the ease of working relationship (31.9%), reliability of payment (26.6%) and reasonableness of payment terms (23.1%).

Reasons for not working with a particular agency

The top two reasons for not working for an agency were onerous terms and conditions (unfair to the freelancer) at 25.7% and impersonal communications (mass emails, first-come first-served job allocation) at 24.4%.

Methodology – The survey was conducted online. Respondents were invited to participate through a combination of direct email invitations and posting to various online translator and interpreter forums and social media. The response rate from direct invitations was 28.1%, the response rate from forum postings is unknown.

Demographics – 739 qualified respondents completed the survey. Respondents who indicated they were neither a translator nor an interpreter or not a freelancer were disqualified. 30% of the respondents indicated they work solely for agencies, 38% reported an 80:20 mix of agencies and direct clients, 9% reported a 60:40 mix, 8% reported a 50:50 mix, and 13% reported less than 50% of their work came from agencies. 83% of the respondents reported being primarily a translator, 5% work primarily as an interpreter, and 10% reported an equal mix of translation and interpreting work. The respondents' gender mix was in line with the industry average at 70% female and 30% male. The age distribution fell into a standard bell curve.

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