

Q: How can I find paid work as an environmental translator?

A: As I have mentioned in the past, only a very small number of environmental protection organisations have a translation budget so the specialist environmental translator has to cast his or her net wider in the search to build up a customer base. As in the last article, none of these ideas are particularly earth-shattering, but are worth considering for someone thinking of entering the environmental translation market.

Shortly before I made the transition from being an in-house to freelance translator, I spent some time brainstorming about who might need environmental translations (more specifically translations pertaining to waste management in my case) that were not highly technical and also be able to afford my rates. Incidentally, I also held a presentation about the opportunities for environmental translators at our local ATA chapter's 2008 symposium and will be happy to share my PowerPoint presentation with anyone who sends me an e-mail. I also highly recommend reading Patrick Oblander's article in the March 2009 ATA Chronicle entitled "Environmental Translation: Market Overview".

My brainstorming session produced the following groups of customers:

1) Big players outside the environmental field

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports are, at least in my experience, one of the hottest trends within the environmental translation field right now. Towards the late 1990s, businesses started putting out environmental reports, basically boasting how many gallons of water, tonnes of waste and greenhouse gas emissions they had saved over the past year. Some would say that not much has changed since then. These documents have now largely been replaced with CSR reports which are traditionally published yearly together with annual financial reports. The scope of these reports has also gradually been widened to cover what is referred to as the triple bottom line (also known as people, planet, profit), meaning that businesses are judged not only on their financial results, but also on their social and environmental performance. CSR reports are not restricted to companies providing environmental services, either. Just a glimpse at [Corporate Register.com](http://CorporateRegister.com) shows that BAE Systems, the Inter-American Bank and HP are among the companies that have published CSRs in the past month or so. It is generally hard to land these kinds of projects as an independent contractor. In my experience, many large businesses subcontract these projects to translation agencies or groups of translators given the number of languages and size of files involved.

2) Environmental services providers

In addition to the CSR reports, large multinational companies that provide environmental services also have a whole host of documents that need to be translated. It is also worth remembering that a lot of small and medium-sized companies are now looking to expand across their borders and generally have a lot of company brochures, annual reports and similar materials that they want translated beforehand. As well as press releases and other corporate communications documents, these businesses often have internal documents

that they want to share with employees at their various branches, providing a steady flow of work once you have your foot in the door.

3) Consulting firms, trade journals and research institutes

Consulting firms and research institutes also invest a great deal of money on projects and then want to share their results as broadly as possible. These documents can range from run-of-the-mill press releases and websites to highly technical academic research papers. It is also worthwhile researching what the large trade journals are in your specific field of the environmental market and seeing if they have foreign-language editions (if only for terminology research purposes).

4) Government institutions

National and local governments also constitute a large source of government work. The spectrum ranges from multinational environmental agreements to city government flyers for minority populations. The approaches to finding government customers vary as substantially as the rates they pay: For instance, some high-level government institutions, especially in Europe, issue calls for bids for translation services on an annual or biannual basis, while others subcontract work to translation agencies. It is worth contacting the public relations office and simply asking how they go about finding translators.

5) Translation agencies

Of course, translation agencies should not be forgotten. In reality, translation agencies only make up a very small percentage of my income as I have found that I much prefer working with direct clients for a number of reasons. I only take on non-environmental agency projects in very rare cases and have let most agencies that I have worked with in the past know that I specialise in environmental translation and don't dabble in other fields at all any more.

Now that I had outlined my target markets it was time to get specific. As well as noting when governmental institutions were having their next calls for proposals, I also contacted the larger translation agencies to let them know my speciality. When looking for end clients, I realised that a lot of the larger firms already had their own translators or agencies of choice so one of my best weapons was targeting companies on the verge of expansion. I found that the following steps gave me an edge:

Subscribe to and read specialist industry publications: Know which companies are looking to expand and/or have recently set up foreign subsidiaries and get in touch. Mention where you had read about their plans, thus consolidating the client's impression of you as a serious professional who takes the time to keep your finger on the industry's pulse.

Attend trade fairs: This goes to the above point. Once a potential client can put a face to

your name, you are much more likely to get (and, more importantly, keep) his or her business. Don't harass companies on the first day of the fair, but wait until quiet times when no one is at their stand and don't hard-sell. Talk about the hot topic in the industry (a big merger, new legislation etc.) or ask them about a terminology question you've had in the back of your mind for a while. When you get back home, send a quick follow-up e-mail thanking the person for his or her time, mentioning your availability for translation projects should the need arise.

Get your name out: One of the best ways, and the way that I ultimately found most of my current clients, is word of mouth. Make sure that your fellow translators also know your speciality and refer work that you do not feel confident in handling to other freelancers: they tend to repay the favour. Write articles for industry publications, give presentations, start a blog, become active in your local translation association and hand out your business card to anyone and everyone who might possibly need an environmental translator at some point down the road. Of course, make sure that you have a website and develop marketing materials in both your source and target language to make it easier for customers to contact you and find out more about your background.

Q: I'm a recent graduate/new translator interested in specialising in environmental translation. Where can I find volunteer translation opportunities to build up my resume?

A: First of all, it goes without saying that you should have a good background knowledge of environmental issues before embarking on any translation project, paid or unpaid. Just because you are providing a free service is no excuse for turning in poorly researched translations. If you play your cards right, you should be able to convince the organisation to list your name as translator on any printed documents (e.g. translation services provided courtesy of...) and/or website. Moreover the terminology research will stand you in good stead for later on. In an ideal scenario, someone will end up reading a document with your name on, be impressed by your mastery of specialist terminology or simply need a translator for their (hopefully paying) project and get in touch.

The other basic rules of business apply: Be pleasant and professional. You should let your contact know in advance that they will need to be flexible about deadlines and that any paid translations will have to take priority over volunteer work. They should be satisfied - after all they are getting your services for free.