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# Working with direct clients

A guide for translators

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# Introduction

Whilst most freelance translators have experience of working with agencies, and advice for dealing successfully with the latter has been well documented by CIOL through various webinars and presentations, we decided to explore the relationship between freelance translators working directly with their clients, without an intermediary. To this end, we interviewed six experienced translators, all members of the Translating Division Steering Group, and asked them about the advantages and challenges of working with direct clients and to give advice about how to find them. We hope that you find what they have to say of interest and useful to expand your career as a freelance translator.



**Karine Chevalier-Watts MCIL CL**  
Coordinator of CIOL Translating Division  
Steering Group

# Working with direct clients as a freelance translator



**Rachel Wingfield**  
MCIL CL

Whilst there can be drawbacks to working with direct clients, such as the unpredictability of the flow of work and the risk of spending a lot of time on one single project, there are many advantages.

The first one is that you are likely to get a higher fee than if you get work via an agency. Also, by approaching clients within your area of specialism, you may end up spending more time doing the type of translation work you enjoy. Also, by dealing with a direct client, you may get a better sense of the overall project, and thus get better visibility as to where the translation fits within it, which is not only helpful for the translation task itself, but can also be rewarding in terms of understanding the part you have played in making the client's project a success.

Ultimately, there is likely to be a happy medium between working with agencies and with direct clients, which all depends on personal preference and experience.

So, for now, here are a few tips on how to increase your direct client base.

Get yourself known and reach out to your potential clients by networking and having a strong presence online.

## Networking

- Make sure you tell all your friends and acquaintances about what you do, as word of mouth can bring in clients, and of course, it's a good idea to have your business cards handy!
- If you're not already one, become a member of CIOL and any other membership bodies you think would enable you to meet fellow translators and other members of the profession. CIOL organises regular events like its Annual Conference and a raft of CPD events, while its divisions put together many half-day events as well as shorter online seminars which are worth attending as you are not only likely to learn something new, but you will also get the chance to make new acquaintances and possible business partners. It's worth knowing that CIOL is also on the look-out for volunteers to help at its events, so that's also another way to join in the fun and make friends in the process!

- As a linguist, you can feed your passion for languages by attending language fairs where you cannot only browse through the many stalls and pick up a few books, but you will also get to meet fellow linguists and hear about all the latest developments in the fields of teaching, translation, interpreting etc during the seminars that take place at the fair.
- Depending on your area of expertise, for example whether you are a legal, medical, technical, finance etc translator, one way to reach your potential clients is to attend events such as conferences, exhibitions and talks related to your particular specialism. If you do plan to attend such an event, it is useful to do some research so you have a clear understanding of the types of companies, attendees or exhibitors who will be at the event including anticipating their potential translation needs, which will enable you to approach them more confidently, market yourself better and target your services more effectively.

### **Having an active presence online**

- Create an Internet site and buy some advertising space in relevant publications, depending on your areas of specialism.
- Set up a LinkedIn account and other business-related social networks, and most importantly be active on those networks. This means posting regularly including, for example, feedback from clients and links to translations you have done so potential clients can see the breadth and quality of your work.

Wishing you all the best in your quest for new clients!



# Working with direct clients as a freelance translator



**Jenni Radford**  
MCIL CL

Working with direct clients is very rewarding but can bring its own set of challenges. Here are a few points to consider if you are thinking of taking this path as a freelance translator.

## Preparation

If you intend to work with direct clients, you need to be confident in your ability to handle the various business and project management aspects involved. While as translators we employ our skills as linguists and writers, good business and organisational skills are key when managing the day-to-day aspects of working with direct clients. If you are a general translator, consider developing a specialist field. Be confident that you have built up your experience in the types of documents you translate and your knowledge of the subject areas you work in before you offer translation services in that specialism to direct clients.

Working with direct clients means some of your time will be spent project managing as well as translating. Make sure you allow time for other matters such as client communication, responding to enquiries, marketing and CPD, otherwise you may find yourself working long

hours to fit in the day-to-day aspects of dealing directly with clients around your translation work.

Think about your potential client base and how you are going to find clients. Increase your visibility and make it easy for potential clients to find you by using professional listings and databases, online platforms – both industry related and general work marketplaces – and consider having a website if you don't have one already. To optimise your online presence, make sure your professional profile is up to date and your brand reflects the types of clients you are trying to reach.

## Professionalism

A professional approach is key. Take time to check that key documentation is in order and whether there are any legal aspects you need to take into account. It will save you time in the long run if you have templates prepared or a document that explains what you do and how you work. If you currently use a free email account, consider getting an address with your domain name to portray a more professional image.

## Availability

You may find your direct clients will have different expectations about your availability. You will need to think about how you will deal with



urgent requests or longer projects, how you will manage clients' requests when you are on holiday, and what is a reasonable timeframe when responding to email enquiries.

### **In conclusion**

Finding and building long-term relationships with direct clients is not easy. Be prepared to spend time on marketing yourself to potential clients, and if you currently work with agencies, it's probably a good idea to continue working with some of them while you explore working with direct clients and build your client base.



## Working with direct clients as a freelance translator



**Natalia Racheyskova**  
MA MCIL CL,  
Russian/Ukrainian Language Translator

Once you have found your direct clients, here is some recommended advice:

1. Charge your highest rates (within reason). Direct clients respect professionalism and do not expect a good translator to be cheap.
2. Educate your client about what a translator can and cannot do. In many cases it would be an eye-opener for your client.
3. Explain to your client that translators could be their bridge to understanding cultural nuances and conventions of the target language culture, and that the client should pay attention to translators' suggestions on improving the translated text to make it better adapted for the target reader and to comply with cultural norms and conventions of the client's international partners.
4. Be professional and stick to the deadlines no matter what! If you slip once, you might as well say goodbye to your direct client. There are plenty of highly professional and competent translators around waiting to poach your client.
5. Ask clarifying questions during translation to avoid mistranslation, explaining to the client that your goal is to make the translation read as good as it was written in the original language (and sometimes even better).
6. Try to develop good long-term working relationships with your clients.
7. Keep your eyes peeled and your ears pricked! You never know whom you might meet and what might come out of it.
8. Be generous to other translators – if you recommend them to somebody, they might recommend you to their clients. Remember that direct clients rely on recommendations from trustworthy people for hiring a new translator.
9. Try to maintain a good balance between working for translation agencies and direct clients to increase your earning potential and to avoid the vicious circle of feast or famine.
10. Always be a pleasant and polite person to work with and mind your e-mail and phone manners! Direct clients often recommend a highly skilled translator to other potential clients.

Good luck with your first direct client!

# Working with direct clients as a freelance translator



**Vasiliki Prestidge**  
MCIL CL Member of Council

One may argue that any type of client is a direct client. In fact, many translators do not distinguish between translation agencies and direct clients. For the purposes of this contribution, a direct client means everyone else apart from translation agencies; a client

that is not acting as an intermediary between you, the translator, and the final receiver of the translation.

Direct clients have acquired a certain prestige over the years. It is perhaps generally accepted that having direct clients is better than working with agencies. As with everything, there are advantages and disadvantages.

It is likely translators may be able to charge direct clients higher fees, although this may not always be the case. Ultimately, it all comes down to the client's budget.

In addition, direct clients may not know enough as to how the translation industry operates. On the one hand, there is an element

of 'educating the client' when working with them. On the other hand, working with translation agencies may imply an established working relationship and process where work is streamlined, rates are agreed, contracts are signed, and everyone knows their role and required tasks once and from the offset.

Finding direct clients takes time and effort. Ideally, the clients come to you. Inbound marketing should place you in front of the eyes of your targeted clients. This requires market and client research, development of client personas, consistent marketing, an authentic branding, strong online presence, convincing specialisation skills, and an established authority in the industry **both online and offline**.

Word of mouth is one of the best ways to acquire good direct clients. Therefore, the quality of your work and the client experience you offer should speak volumes about you and your business. Hopefully, this way you won't have to do much client hunting yourself.



## Working with direct clients as a freelance translator



**Karine Chevalier-Watts**  
MCIL CL  
Owner/Director of KLAS Languages

There are several advantages to working directly with clients as a freelance translator instead of through agencies.

Firstly, you are more able to negotiate your own rates with a client directly and you are more likely to be able to charge more than you would charge an agency as there is no intermediary.

Secondly, if you have any questions regarding the project, such as terminology that you may not understand or regarding the formatting of the translation, it is easier and quicker to ask the client directly than going through a third party.


Dealing with the client directly, you are better able to understand their needs and you can establish a long-lasting relationship. If the client is happy with your translation and the way you have handled their project, from initial enquiry to delivery, they are much more likely to keep reverting to you in future for their translation requirements.

A direct client will also be happy to spread the word about your services, and recommend you to their relatives, friends, and colleagues and leave you positive reviews on your website or social media profiles.

However, dealing with a client directly has some disadvantages.

Often, a member of the public approaching you to translate a document, has never dealt with a translator before and the procedure needs to be explained to them, especially in the case of certified translations. You may also need to justify your quote; if for instance the document only has a few lines of text to be translated but has a complex layout with tables, boxes, logos, seals, signatures or lots of numbers (such as a school transcript or a bank account statement), you would need to explain that your quote also reflects the time spent reproducing the original formatting of the source document or the client may not understand why you are charging so much for just a few lines of text.

Other aspects of the translation that you would need to clarify with your client would be the method of delivery of the translation (electronically, by post or both); how they can pay for your service (BACS, cheque, PayPal) and the currencies they can pay you in, if your client lives abroad.



If the client requires a certified translation, then you should explain to them what this consists of as they may not already understand what it means and what to expect from the translator.

When dealing with a member of the public whom you have never dealt with before, you also need to take safety measures to ensure that they will pay for your work; as a basis, you should ask them for their full name, their postal address, their telephone number; you could do a search online of their name (Facebook, LinkedIn) to have a better idea of the person you are dealing with. Depending on the size of the project, you could ask them to either pay the full amount of the translation in advance or at least pay a deposit to secure it.

When dealing with a company, you should check their website to understand who they are and what they do. If the company is an international group, the chances are they are already used to working with translators; nevertheless, before quoting them for a first translation, you should ask what is the latest deadline for the translation, the purpose and audience of the translation, whether this is a one-off assignment or could it lead to further recurrent work, and, if so, what would be the frequency and expected volume. You would also need to find out if someone in the company will be able to help if you had any queries concerning the layout or terminology.

If they already have their website translated into your language, it provides a great reference for their preferred style and terminology. You could also ask the client if they already have a glossary of technical terms that they would like you to use.

Once the translation has been agreed, you should ask the company the procedure for submitting your invoices to them. Do they have specific payment terms? Who should you address your invoice to? Do you need to quote a certain project number?

In terms of finding direct clients, these can come from various sources. In my experience, many of my clients come via the enquiry form of my website ([www.klaslanguages.co.uk](http://www.klaslanguages.co.uk)). Some come from Yell.com where I advertise my services all over the UK. Others come from private recommendations from previous and existing clients. Some come upon the recommendation of other translators who know me. Last, but not least, some clients come to me after viewing my profile on CIOL's online directory, Find-a-Linguist, or on the registry of translators approved by the French Consulate in London.

Finally, you can also find direct clients by searching local companies that are likely to use translation services in your own language combinations and by attending business networking events and trade fairs where you can make some valuable contacts.

## Working with direct clients as a freelance translator



**Aurelija Skurvydaite**  
MCIL

When it comes to working with direct clients vs agencies, we won't find a clear-cut answer as to which of these is better. As freelance translators, most of us will end up working with both and I believe that in the end it comes down to our personal preferences.

Working directly with clients will allow us to earn more and our clients will also save money as there will be no agency fees. Another great advantage of working with direct clients is that we'll be able to focus on and approach clients in the fields that we enjoy and prefer working in. Besides, direct communication between a client and a translator makes it easier to solve arising issues and problems and we will be able to do it much quicker and save precious time for both translator and client.

However, my personal experience shows that it sometimes might be much harder to find direct clients than agencies to work with. Agencies find clients for you. If you decide to do it yourself, you can start by doing some cold calling, emailing potential clients (eg, firms

of solicitors, if you want to get into the field of legal translations), attending events, conferences, trade fairs in the fields you are interested in.

Make sure to be registered in various directories for translators and allow direct clients to find you. And don't forget to talk with your other language colleagues who already work with direct clients that might require services in your language combination.



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## About CIOL

CIOL (Chartered Institute of Linguists) is the leading professional body for people using foreign language skills at work, setting the standard for linguists worldwide. Membership offers professional recognition, and our range of membership grades leads to Chartership, recognised worldwide as the gold standard for practitioners, whatever their profession, publicly understood as a badge of quality and competence. We offer many benefits and services, such as mentoring and access to networks. Our awarding organisation, CIOL Qualifications, delivers fully regulated professional language qualifications, such as the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting and the Diploma in Translation, recognised by government departments, agencies, business, universities and schools.

For more information on membership and qualifications, visit [ciol.org.uk](http://ciol.org.uk)

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