



capital translator

Newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of the American Translators Association
Vol. 20, No. 5 June 1998

The Cost of Doing Business...

Can You Really Save Money on Your Phone Bills?

by Michael Wahlster

Every professional freelance translator knows that running a home office is not for the financially faint-hearted. You need space, office furniture, computer equipment, software, reference books, and most of all, you need the communication lifelines that connect you to the outside world: fax, modem and phone lines. Although theoretically, one phone line is sufficient to accommodate a fax, a modem, and a telephone, practicality, efficiency, and the IRS all but demand two or more lines. And with long distance providers being as ubiquitous as Internet providers, it's quite difficult to make an informed choice without spending a substantial amount of valuable time on research.

Luckily for us, fellow NCATA member Michael Wahlster did just that, and he's willing to clue us in on his findings. Thanks, Michael, for putting us one step ahead in the game. —Ed.

About 10 months ago, my accountant told me that I should look into saving money on my phone calls. She was right. I was paying between \$250.00 and \$300.00 a month in phone bills for my two *business* lines, not a small amount for a freelance

translator. About half of that amount came from intra- and inter-state calls, and the other half from overseas calls, mainly to Germany, Japan, and the UK.

Today, my phone bills hover around \$60.00 with occasional jumps up to \$80.00 in very busy months. So what did I have to do to lower my phone bills?

I started out by doing what most people would probably do—I called the big names in long-distance telephone service. I spent a lot of time on the phone and found that getting real information about the cost of calls was like pulling teeth without anesthesia. The big companies love to tell you how much you can save—but have you ever tried to figure out the base price behind the promised savings? Plans abound: you get extra savings if you pay a monthly fee; if you call at certain hours of the day or certain days of the week; if you call a subscriber to the same long distance service; if you call a number you have pre-registered with them; for the number you call most in any given billing cycle. To sweeten the deal, you get a certain number of free minutes when you switch providers, frequent

flyer miles for your favorite airline, savings on selected goods and services. Some even bait the hook with very low rates for the first two or three months with the new service.

At the end of all this, I still didn't know exactly how much I would be paying for my phone calls, so I

...continued on page 3

Inside

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| President's Corner | 2 |
| Working as a Translator | 4 |
| Accreditation News | 5 |
| PSD Deadline | 5 |
| PSD Advertising | 5 |
| Puntos y Puntas | 6 |
| NFLC Colloquium | 7 |
| Brain Puzzler | 7 |
| Calendar | 8 |



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President's Corner

by Scott Brennan



NCATA's seminar on Translation and International Development will be held June 20 at the Embassy Suites Hotel conference center in Alexandria. As you can gather from the program included with this issue, the organizers have balanced an overview of the development field and access to subject-area specialists, with targeted discussions of translation techniques, terminology, phraseology and word choice (key terms, pitfalls), and related topics like politically correct language and target-audience awareness.

The morning session will bring participants face to face with professionals working in key specialties. IMF translator and NCATA member Neil Inglis will give an introductory overview aimed at bringing the broad field called international development into focus from the translator's point of view.

The other two speakers in the morning session are practitioners with extensive regional and subject-area experience. John Bachmann will speak from his experience on infrastructure development projects in North Africa and elsewhere (he speaks French and Spanish, and in fact worked as a translator early in his career). Lee Baker, vice president at an established Washington consulting firm that handles chiefly Agency for International Development (AID) contracts in urban development, got into the field through the Peace Corps, a common route for his generation, and worked extensively in Latin America (perfecting his Spanish in

the process). In the early and mid-1990s he headed one of AID's first projects in Russia and Ukraine, and has since been involved in projects in Vietnam, Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

If your curiosity is already piqued, you will be happy to note that a Q&A period has been scheduled: Have your questions ready...

The afternoon session will be strictly translator to translator. NCATA members Luis Fierro and his colleague Maria Eugenia Kyburz at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) will speak on sustainable development as it is practiced at IDB, the translation of emerging concepts and paradigms (sustainability, empowerment, gender and ethnic issues), and the use of, and demand for, staff and freelance translators at IDB. Alison Sondhaus-Carroll, Kim Olson and I will give presentations on translating requests for proposals and bidding documents from Latin America, Francophone Africa and AID. Finally, a panel of translators with extensive subject-area experience will field questions, as the floor is opened for discussion.

International development is an important niche market in the Washington area, and this NCATA seminar promises to offer seasoned translators and interpreters, as well as newcomers with a desire to learn, an excellent opportunity to deepen their knowledge and polish their skills. I'm looking forward to seeing you all there at the last NCATA event before the long summer break!

School's out for summer (well, almost)...

and your *CT* is also taking a break. Look forward to receiving your next issue at the beginning of September. A safe and pleasant summer to all! –Ed.

Phone Bills ...continued from page 1

asked if I could send them my last bill and get them to tell me how much (if anything) I could save by switching. Interestingly enough, only one of the big names agreed to do that, and I still haven't heard back after more than 6 months.

Wasn't anybody out there selling telephone service with clear, easy-to-compare rates and no smokescreens?

I started to research the subject and found that there are literally hundreds of long-distance telephone companies offering a wide variety of prices and services. Most of them sell through agents or resellers. It is definitely worthwhile checking out several of these. The Internet is a good source of names and phone numbers, and you can find a few Web addresses, although I must point out that listing them here does not mean a recommendation of any kind.

Here are a few important considerations:

- **Domestic vs. International.** Analyze your phone bill to see where charges are generated. If you have a substantial amount of overseas calls, it may be better to select a service with cheap overseas rates, even if their domestic rates are not as low as their competitors'. If, on the other hand, you call internationally only on rare occasions, you'd be smart to go for rock-bottom domestic rates.
- **Flat Rates.** I make calls at all hours of the day, every day of the week, so I prefer a flat rate that applies at all times. Most discount services offer flat rates. If your calling pattern is different, you may be able to save more by selecting a service that gives you extra-cheap rates during the times you call most often. This applies to both domestic and international calls.
- **Minimum Amounts.** Some agents and companies offer cheap rates if you are being billed at least a certain amount. If that amount is low and you are certain to incur high-

er bills, this may be one solution. But beware of high minimum amounts.

- **Access Numbers.** Make sure you can make interstate calls the usual way, i.e. 1 + area code and number. Some services require special access numbers. There may be a financial incentive for awkward access codes, however. Only you can make that decision.
- **Calling Cards.** The service should offer you the possibility of making calls away from home that appear on your regular bill, but be on the lookout for high service charges on calling card calls. Ideally, the rates should be the same as for calls from your phone, and there should be no surcharges. If you travel overseas, you'll probably want to be able to use the service from abroad. Make sure that toll-free dial-in numbers are available in the countries you visit most.
- * **Billing in One-Minute Increments.** A minute is a long time, and you shouldn't be charged for a full minute if you are only using a fraction of one. Your service provider should bill in one-second—or at most six-second (0.1-minute)—increments. My guess is that changing from 1-minute to 0.1-minute increments alone will give you substantial savings.
- * **800 Numbers and Call Back.** Depending on your business setup, it may be important to have a toll-free number or the possibility for overseas contacts to call you at US rates. You should investigate

whether the long-distance provider you are interested in offers such services.

So what did I select?

After much thinking, I went with Telegroup, a service provider out of Iowa. They seemed to strike a good balance between high tech and low charges. I signed up for the service through World Telecom in New York City, a Telegroup agent. As with many agents, business was handled by e-mail and fax. Their URL is **www.worldtele.com**.

For domestic long distance, I dial the usual 1 in front of the number and pay \$0.10 per minute at all times, billed in 6-second increments. For international calls, I selected access via an 800-number to get cheaper rates. I programmed the number into one of my speed-dial memories. After dialing the 800-number, I wait for another dial-tone and continue dialing with the country code. I pay \$0.21 per minute to Germany, \$0.12 to the UK, and \$0.32 to Japan. These prices can change from time to time, but so far they have always gone down, never up. The only dark spot on the otherwise bright picture is intrastate rates. I pay \$0.169 per minute for calls within the state—and I do make a lot of calls to Northern Virginia.

And I don't need my long distance company to give me frequent flyer miles—I get them by paying my Telegroup bill with my airline's credit card. ✍



Here some Web sites to start with:

<http://www.metrowesttelecom.com/index.htm>
<http://www.bestphonerates.com/index.htm>
<http://www.valutele.com/telco.html>
<http://www.tssphoto.com/ilink.html>
<http://www.keycommunications.com/telecom/>
<http://www.davis-company.com/>
http://www.prodial.com/10cents_phone.html

Part 2 of a 2-part article

Working as a translator

by Laura Benali



Once the translator is ready to begin practicing his/her craft, s/he is then faced with having to make decisions concerning such questions as where and how to practice, along with a myriad of other professional issues.

The question of where to practice is one that offers distinct flexibility for the independent contractor. Thanks to modern inventions such as the FAX, e-mail, Web pages, and express delivery, translators have more flexibility than ever in choosing the location of their residence. The recruiter I interviewed told me that a translator's location is often not even a consideration for the agency, and it is not uncommon for agencies to work with translators whom they have never met in person.

Regardless of where a freelance translator chooses to live and practice, s/he must still face the decision of how to find work. There are basically two ways for independent contractors to find and deal with clients. One way is to deal with them directly (either through personal contact or through referrals), and the other is to go through a translation company (Note: Due to current disputes involving state labor departments, translators tend to prefer the terms "company" or "bureau" to "agency"). Of those translators who responded to the survey, most said they preferred to find work on their own, yet when asked how they most often do find work, most said they do so through a translation company. Each way has its pros and cons.

Working directly for a client, a freelance translator can earn up to twice what s/he could by working for a translation company. However, a translation company can serve as

both a valuable connection and buffer between the translator and the client. This can be helpful when it comes to collecting payment, editing, and finding work in the first place.

U.S. translators working into English might want to consider the question of translating for foreign clients and/or bureaus, since these organizations could represent a substantial portion of the market for into-English translations. According to independent translator Per N. Dohler, freelancers working in the U.S. have certain advantages for foreign organizations over those living abroad. He outlines these advantages, and details strategies for working with foreign organizations in his article in the January, 1997 issue of *The Chronicle*.

The choices are up to the individual, but "[i]n general, a translator is well advised to have a mix of direct and bureau customers. As s/he gains business and translation experience, s/he can gradually increase the direct/bureau ratio" (Bokor).

Once the translator has established a framework for his/her practice, many issues remain to be considered. One of these issues is whether to carry liability insurance on one's work. Of the translators I surveyed, only one out of ten had liability coverage, and one recommended incorporating oneself as a way to avoid personal financial ruin in case of a lawsuit.

Another important issue that the translator must take into account is that of editing and feedback. "Great translators...have had their translations mauled, picked over, dissected, disemboweled, examined, edited, published, revised, and amended by their translation colleagues, editors, and reviewers, sometimes for years"

(Hendzel). The translators surveyed tended to have their own work edited by fellow translators, agency editors, and client editors, but many of them noted that they would appreciate more feedback.

A third issue for consideration is that of communication. Since the freelance translator often works in relative isolation, communication with other translators can be an important source of information on any number of concerns. Many freelance translators have an e-mail address on Compuserve, and many use the Compuserve Bulletin Board known as FLEFO (Foreign Language Educators Forum—<http://directory.compuserve.com/Forums/FLEFO/Library.htm>) to communicate with one another.

A further technical issue that the translator must contemplate is that of how to submit his/her work. Some freelancers send a diskette and hard copy by express delivery, some submit their work by e-mail, and yet others post their work to a Web page. In this age of computers, it would be easy to assume that a translator is always required to submit his/her work in "camera-ready" condition, but presently this appears to be required of few translators. Indeed, many "[c]lients expect to be able make [sic] changes at any stage of their project" (Davis). Of the translators surveyed, only three had ever had to submit camera-ready work.

A final, and very important point that must be taken into consideration by any freelance translator is that of payment, and it appears from the survey and other sources that there are countless ways of being paid, although being paid in advance is rarely if ever among them. Kevin Hendzel recommends

quoting one's rate rather than waiting for companies or clients to say what they will pay (Hendzel). One survey respondent recommended translating a page or so of a job in order to determine speed (which she said will vary according to the type of work), and then quoting a per-word rate that is in reality based upon the time that will be involved. For short turnaround, nine of the ten survey respondents would charge an extra fee. Whether working through an agency or directly for a client, the translator should scrutinize his/her contract carefully. James E. Gates and Ana E. Gray offer advice on how to do this in their article in the January, 1997 issue of *The Chronicle*. When working directly for a client, a translator may sometimes be required to provide his/her own contract. ATA offers a model contract for this purpose.

In conclusion, the challenges and rewards faced by the translator who wishes to work independently are many. Lacking time was the challenge most often mentioned by survey respondents, but also mentioned were dealing with client ignorance, keeping up-to-date on language and subject knowledge, finding work, and understanding subject matter. Among the most rewarding aspects mentioned were ongoing learning, being one's own boss, receiving positive feedback from a client, never being bored, achieving the finished product, and reaching a wider readership. For translators who value flexibility and freedom, working freelance could be the best of all career options. ✍

Accreditation News

by Bill Keasbey



The last accreditation examination sitting on April 25 attracted 29 candidates. Since the demand for accreditation seems to continue unabated, we decided to hold another examination on Saturday, September 19, at 1:30 p.m. The site will be the same as last time, namely the Alexandria Graduate Education Center of The George Washington University, 1775B Duke Street, Alexandria, VA. The Education Center is next to the King Street Metro station and above a parking garage where one may park for \$2 on Saturday.

Accreditation examination sittings will also be held in Raleigh, NC, and Brecksville, OH, in June, at the Annual Conference in Hilton Head, SC, in November, and at a number of other sites listed in *The ATA Chronicle*.

To register for the examination you will need to obtain the necessary forms from the National Headquarters of the American Translators Association. The address and telephone number are given in the box headed Capital Translator on the second page of this newsletter. You must be a member of the ATA to take the accreditation examination. Practice tests to help you determine your readiness for the examination and analyze areas needing improvement may also be obtained from ATA Headquarters. ✍

Remember Your Deadline!!

August 31, 1998, is the deadline for submitting your information to be included in this year's printed *Professional Services Directory*. Don't wait until the last minute. Submit your PSD Information form or check out your entry on our Web site (<http://www.ncata.org>) and send any changes in writing to the Membership Chair (NCATA@GW-Language.com). This is the last reminder! The next newsletter issue will reach you after the August 31 deadline. ✍

Advertise in This Year's PSD

Whether you have an entry in the NCATA *Professional Services Directory* or not, "it pays to advertise". From business-card size to a full page, NCATA members can advertise their services at greatly discounted rates. The directory goes to nearly 300 buyers of language services and will be used over and over again, thus enhancing your visibility. Contact the Membership Chair (NCATA@GW-Language.com) for a price list. Deadline is August 31, 1998. Don't miss it! ✍

Pellet's *Puntos y Puntas*

Ten Things You Can Do Immediately to Improve Your Translations

by Mercedes M. Pellet

A long time ago, when I was in my first year of college, I attended a writers conference specifically designed to allow would-be writers to talk to the professionals. Although my enthusiasm far exceeded my knowledge and my writing skills, I was convinced that all I needed to become a great writer was a chance to talk to a *real* writer. Then, as if by magic, I would go beyond *posing* as a writer — that is, drinking endless cups of coffee in third-rate cafés and discussing whether Hemingway could actually write, and wondering aloud if there was something in Irish water that helped produce immortal writers — and actually *become* a writer.

What a disappointment! When I had the opportunity to listen to the masters who actually spent their days grinding out words, I was struck by how uninteresting they all sounded! While I desperately wanted to hear how they coped with the *core trauma of their lives*, and how they managed the cathartic effort of turning deep emotions into words, the professional writers had extremely mundane, if not boring, advice: read, write, practice, have discipline, organize yourself.

Definitely *not* what I, as an 18-year old, was looking for! No drama, no *deathless prose*, no life with a capital *L*. The ultimate insult was leveled against me by a short writer who looked somewhat like an accountant and who, much to my surprise, wrote the most lurid prose imaginable! He unfeelingly asked me: „Do you want to **be** a writer or do you actually **want** to write?“ With ill grace, I actually scribbled some of the advice he gave me that day in a dry voice, punctuated by his delicate throat clearings.

Am I ever glad I did that! His words have become pearls of wisdom with the passage of time. Later in life, when I became a translator, I adapted his advice to my new profession and it still continues to serve me. I am sharing that advice with you today in the hope that you, too, will find it as useful as I have all these many years.

1. Define Your Goals

Don't become a translator because "it's a clean way to make a living" and "might as well use all those languages." Translation is hard work. It's only fun when you like the words themselves. If you want to make quick and easy money, there are a lot of better ways to do that! Translation means solitude, love of research, devotion to words, and the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake. It also means learning to use technology effectively. Examine your motives and think of translation as a place: don't take the bus to Chicago if you want to go to Minneapolis!

2. Find a Translation Niche

There are two schools of translation: one takes the position that translation is an art, unmeasurable, unquantifiable; the other views translation as a business and, as such, governed by the dynamics of a market economy. The art of translation is, with a few notable exceptions, poorly remunerated. If finances are an issue for you, identify a market for your work and establish a niche for yourself. While there are some translators that follow the approach of "if it's written, I'll translate it!" that is generally not a good idea. It is hard to become really good at something when that something changes from day to day. It is best to identify a cluster of subjects

that meet three criteria: common elements, personal knowledge, and individual interest.

3. Read About the Subject

This is the most uninspiring advice anyone can give — and the most valuable! If you find yourself falling asleep while reading an article on your chosen subject, that is NOT a subject you should be translating. Read everything you can on the subject, both in the source and target languages into which you want to translate. Read the articles aloud so that you can *feel* the cadence of the language and the way the subject is supposed to sound. Investigate unexplained acronyms and find out where the in-group expressions come from. Keep in mind that every subject has its devotees and to find out their inherent interest all you need to do is find a writer who *feels* that interest.

4. Organize Yourself

Don't duplicate your research or the work of others. Use the *BOT-WOO* approach: „Build on the Work of Others.“ To do that, don't assume that disorganization is a genetic characteristic or something that makes you special. Disorganized research simply means you have to do the same work again because you can't remember where you put it! After you find what others have learned, you need to have a system to identify useful information, collect it, store it and retrieve it. Chaotic work environments are not part of the *artistic temperament*. They are simply bad work habits.

5. Write As Often As You Can

Don't limit yourself to writing "when you have to." Write on your chosen subjects or write poems to yourself. It doesn't matter what you write. The simple act of putting your

ideas in order and searching for the *mot juste*, will send you off into interesting linguistic tangents that will help you when you translate. Something that is fun as well as a good mental exercise is doing crossword puzzles.

6. Form a Network

Associate with people who are already doing the type of translation you would like to do. Communicate with experts in the field who are willing to share their experience and their knowledge. But remember that *to network* means that the other people can get as much from you as you can get from them, so maintain a helpful attitude and make sure you have something to offer.

7. Subscribe to Periodicals

At first glance, this may seem another version of number 3 above. Not so. Although you may not read every periodical you subscribe to, their purpose is to give you an idea of the trends in the industry that

interest you and, above all, the terminology they use. Advertisements as well as articles are a great place to find the latest terminology.

8. Review the Translations of Others

One complaint that new translators often voice is how few people are willing to edit their translations. The truth is that most translators I know consider reviewing the translations of others with the enthusiasm they reserve for root canal work. Many of my colleagues say that they prefer to redo the translation, rather than correct somebody else's bad translation. However, a very good way to improve our own translations is by identifying the mistakes of others. Remember, a smart person learns from his/her own mistakes; a truly wise person learns from the mistakes of others.

9. Join a Professional Association

If you are reading this, you already belong to the NCATA. If

your finances permit it, join the ATA and one other association related to the subject you are interested in — and don't be a passive member. Get involved! You will be amazed at how much you can get from volunteering, even in a minor way.

10. Translate, Translate and Translate

I have saved the best advice for last: Practice. The only way you become really good at something is by doing it often and perfecting it every time you do it. Stretch those linguistic triceps and celebrate the nimbleness with which you jump from one language to the other.

I know, I know. None of this sounds like *the* earth-shattering secret to success. But, believe it or not, this advice is what that hard-working writer told me so many years ago. And life has taught me he was right! ✍

A Brain Puzzler

An Unusual Paragraph

How quickly can you find out what is unusual about this paragraph? It looks so ordinary that you would think that nothing was wrong with it at all and, in fact, nothing is. But it is unusual. Why? If you study it and think about it you may find out, but I am not going to assist you in any way. You must do it without coaching. No doubt, if you work at it for long it will dawn on you. Who knows? Go to work and try your skill. Par is about half an hour.

The object of this brain puzzler is to find out what is unusual about the paragraph above. Good luck!

The first person who calls the editor with the correct answer will receive an honorable mention in the next *CT*. ✍

NFLC Colloquium

The National Foreign Language Center will hold a colloquium on The State of the Art in Language Testing: The User's Perspective on Monday, June 15, 1998. The NFLC Colloquium Series is designed to provide an interactive forum for language teaching practitioners and other professionals on current issues and research related to foreign language teaching and learning.

The Colloquium will be held at The Johns Hopkins University's Nitze Building, 1740 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. The advance registration fee, which includes lunch, is \$85.00; registration at the door is \$ 95.00.

Please contact Lara Atella at latella@nflc.org or at (202) 667-8100, ext. 15. ✍

Calendar

| Date | Time | Event | Location |
|--------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| June 15 | | NFLC Colloquium Series | Johns Hopkins University, Nitze Bldg., 1740 Mass. Ave., N. W., Washington, DC Contact Lara Atella, 202-667-8100, x 15 |
| September 19 | 1:30 p.m. | Accreditation Exam | Alexandria Graduate Education Center, George Washington University, 1775B Duke Street, Alexandria VA Contact ATA, 703-683-6100 |
| June 20 | all day | International Development Workshop | Embassy Suites Hotel, 1900 Diagonal Rd., Alexandria, VA Contact Alissa Martin, 301-718-0405 |
| Nov. 4-8 | | 39th Annual ATA Conference | Hilton Head, SC Contact ATA at 703-683-6100 |

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