

Takeaway

Selling 101 for freelancers



Gianni Davico

Gianni Davico founded Tesi & testi in 1995 and has been at its helm ever since. In 2005 he published L'industria della traduzione (The Translation Industry), a book on the translation market in Italy.

The freelance translator, in order to be successful, needs three primary skills: linguistic knowledge, familiarity with information technology and market intelligence.

The vast majority of translators have no problems with the first one, and a good number of them are quite IT-savvy, but too many translators lack the third skill. All too often, they don't know how to sell or market themselves, how to get better prices and so on.

The ability to sell at the right price is fundamental to being successful in this field or in any other profession, and there is no doubt that selling is the main hassle for every solo worker in the 21st century. The problem is that no translation school teaches the art of selling. In theory this ought to be a task included in the training stages of every translator, but to invent a platitude, we can say that in theory there is no difference between theory and practice; in practice there is.

You have to love selling. Selling is having the chance to showcase your skills in your field — it's no small matter. Selling, most of all, means being prepared, to have done all the necessary research into the market and the client. It means transferring specific, practical knowledge to the client. Job orders are little more than a consequence. When revenue falls, if the other parts of the business are in place (if you work well, in short) you shouldn't worry too much. Orders will return.

Selling does not mean cold calls or anything like that; the sale follows the fact that someone raised their hand

and expressed interest in your services. It's up to you to take the necessary steps with customers to ensure that both of you get up from the table having obtained what you were looking for.

Okay, but what does this mean, in practice? Here are some practical tips:

1. A prospect is not a friend. A prospect is seeking a supplier for a service. The prospect merely wants to solve a problem, so the translator has to talk in business language, namely in terms of solutions to problems.

2. Lies have short legs. This fact ought to be blatantly obvious, but sadly it is not: all the information you give to potential customers — by mail, orally or in any other form — must be true. The prospect should not discover that you have magnified a feature out of all proportion, because in this way you have betrayed their trust, and you will not have the chance to recover it; additionally, you have wasted their time.

3. Price has its own importance. Price is rarely the first factor of choice (sometimes it is, but it is not the norm). Price, however, has its own significance. And you, the supplier, should not be ashamed of talking about money nor should you hide the price: we can, and we must, speak openly of costs, because they are a part of the overall transaction. When indicating your price you should always smile; you should say it with

pride. You will not always conclude the sale, things will not always go smoothly, but this has to be the idea behind the price concept.

4. Your résumé speaks strongly about the quality of your services. I am always utterly astonished when I read a résumé that contains basic errors. For a professional of the written word this is quite simply unacceptable, and unfortunately means that the translator's work is far from excellent. Your résumé is also, in the vast majority of cases, your general online presence, so be aware of it!

So how can sales of services be set? First of all, you must expect to deal with a very knowledgeable customer and as a result, your primary role will be that of a consultant. The era of informed sellers and clients obliged to stick to what was learned from suppliers is gone forever. Today information is available to anyone at any time and is mostly free—"free, perfect, and now," as in the title of a best-selling book of some years ago. But the goal is, or should be, to become a consultant, partner or supplier whose views are perceived as valuable, and for this reason is listened to.

One final consideration: act like an entrepreneur. This means talking about money, sales, opportunities and threats. This is our work! [\[M\]](#)