

A talk prepared and given by Alex Eames
at the ProZ.com conference, Oxford 2004

Aside

Conventions used in this document.

Text this size was from the overhead projector acetates.

Text this size and font was Alex's script of the spoken material

[and text in italic and square brackets was some kind of input from the floor]

Also please note that this was a spoken presentation, and I'm trying to make this document as close to "being there" as possible, so please realize that spoken language is used rather than written language. So, please, no comments about grammar etc. 😊

Aside

OK, on with the talk...

According to a web site I saw recently (not one of mine), which was marketing a product for people who know a language and want to make money – i.e. wannabe freelance translators...

The Average translator makes over

\$80,000 in their first year.



[good hearty laugh from the floor]



...well, firstly I wonder where that figure comes from? Why choose that amount? Who made that the benchmark? Was it me with my first ebook...

How to Earn \$80,000+ per Year as a Freelance Translator
<http://www.translator tips.com/ht50.html>

...secondly, let's have a show of hands. Who here earned \$80,000 or more in their first year of freelance translating? I suspect it will be a small percentage. *[and in actual fact I was right. 3 or 4 people from a room of about 60-70 put up their hands and there was a lot of laughter]*

So clearly someone here is using a marketing strategy which is demonstrably untrue, which is illegal, not to mention unethical.

Tell the truth, **but tell it well.** (Principle 2)

Is one of my 7 principles for successful web marketing of services.

But more on that later. For now we'll take a look at marketing itself. What is marketing?

Marketing is an ongoing process.

Marketing is every interaction you ever have with a client (past present or future)

Marketing is what you're doing every time you interact with a client, or a prospective client (some people like to think of them as future clients). So every time you get a job from a client, the way you handle yourself, how you react, how you speak to them on the telephone, how quickly you get the job done, how well you get the job done, whether everything works smoothly for the client, how easy you make it for them.

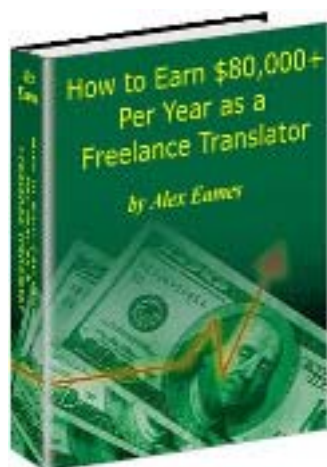
That's all marketing because, that is what guarantees you future work from that client. But you're all experienced translators, and by definition, you all know the value of paying money for services, or you wouldn't be here. But the key is in getting people to understand the value **in your services**. And you have to meet the clients *on their terms* in order to become valuable to them.

Why am I wearing a suit? (impressions last)



I hate wearing a suit, but when you're talking at a conference it's expected that you dress smartly. I wore it to make the right first impression on you guys. I don't like shaving either for that matter. But sometimes you have to do things you don't like in order to fit into people's expectations of you. The first impression people make about you takes a very, very long time to change. It lasts out of all proportion to the time it takes to make it.

People have often criticized the title of my first ebook...



How to Earn \$80,000+ per Year as a Freelance Translator

<http://www.translatorstips.com/ht50.html>

...well, what they don't realize sometimes, people might be put off by the title, particularly British people (as it's got a dollar sign in it). I'm a Brit, but the thing I most love about Americans is the way they are so positive, dynamic and enthusiastic. I think we Brits are a bit reserved and a bit stuck up and negative and cynical as a nation – we're always trying to tear people down.

But you see the title of the book is a filter. If you're one of the people who thinks it's a crap title, you won't buy the ebook. That's fine. It's a legitimate response. Now you've got to think – maybe the author actually thought for several weeks about what the title should be and decided that it would appeal to the kind of person who would be most likely to benefit from the ebook.

Back in 1999 when I first launched the ebook, there was countless discussion in sci.lang.translation about the title – and even Michael Benis, in ITI reviews has told people don't be put off by the title – it's a good ebook.

I did at one time consider launching 2 versions, one called How to Earn \$80,000... and one called how to be a successful freelance translator. I didn't do it because I figured I'd have problems with people who ended up buying both. People might think I was being fraudulent – they're very quick to accuse you on the web. If their computer crashes after giving card details, it's obviously your fault and you're a crook and a fraudster. When selling to people on the web you have to be a bit careful.

So how do we go about marketing? The first thing you really need to do is figure out what you want to achieve...

In marketing, you need a...



...goal.

What's yours?

... What do you want to achieve? And write it down. Written down goals are worth far more than vague ideas. If you've got a written down goal posted on your wall, with a date for achieving it, you're going to be more focused on achieving it. You need to specify what your goals are. Not everybody wants to earn \$80,000 a year. It's bloomin' hard work 🤖

I did it for a few years working really really hard with my wife – we both worked together in our business – and we earned really good money for several years. After a while I had back trouble, and we had a child – and after that you don't want to work so hard. You've paid off some or all of your mortgage, you're not particularly bothered about buying a huge fleet of cars, and having lots of exotic holidays.

What's the point of spending several thousand on an exotic holiday, when you've got an young kid who's going to dominate your time while you're there? Better to wait until he's old enough to enjoy it no? In ten years Tomek will be able to go scuba diving with me.

So we've been back-pedaling for a couple of years. But that was our choice, and you have to figure out what's right for you in your time of life and circumstances.

A lot of translators have weaknesses in the marketing area. A lot of translators have a few really good clients and without them, they'd be stuffed, business-wise. If you're happy with that, that's fine (but why did you come to a talk on

marketing?) You just have to think about what might happen if you were to lose one of those extremely good clients.

You always need to have some kind of reserves in the background. So it's always a good idea to have some kind of marketing activity going on. Even if it's just to improve your client list. And I specifically say **improve**, rather than grow. If you take on a client that pays quicker, pays a higher rate, gives you more of the type of specialist work that you're good at that you get really well paid for. Then you can dump one of the clients who gives you work you don't enjoy, pays poorly or late, or is unpleasant to deal with.

You can prune your client list and gradually improve it. As your business matures, you end up doing more of the work you enjoy, getting better paid for it, and doing less. And that's how you can earn more by doing less 😊 And isn't that what we'd all like to be doing? Let's be honest?

So you need a goal. It could be an income goal...
I want to earn 20 grand more next year than I did this year. Or it could be I want to get 3 really good new clients and dump the three worst ones I've got. Or it could be I want to get 5 new clients and keep them all and just work and work and work. It depends what stage of life you're at. It's not for me to decide what your goal should be because I don't know you and your business.

Only you can decide that, and you should decide it. Because if you don't know what you're trying to achieve, that's what you'll achieve – nothing!

As a friend of mine said to me the other day. The most precious gift you can give somebody is your time. **The thing about your time is...**



...you'll never get it back. If you give somebody money, you can always earn more, but if you give somebody your time, it's gone. So

it's up to you to determine your goal, so you can focus your time on achieving what you want to do.

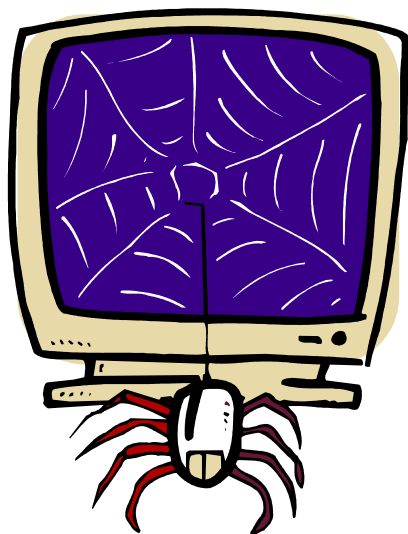
Many translators have an intellectual and academic love of languages. Those who like to work in the arts and literature and all of those more artistic and colorful areas, quite likely became translators because of this love. We got into it as a purely practical matter (you'll all think I'm a Philistine). We needed a business opportunity because life wasn't working well for us. When I was in the pharmaceutical industry, my wife, Malgosia needed something to do. She was a qualified Polish lawyer, sitting at home in the UK bored and taking part-time jobs. We decided that this "translation lark" was really lucrative, and the earning potential was much better than either of us could currently earn, and we could have a great deal more freedom. And it's worked out really well. So for us it was a practical thing. Not an enjoyment thing. But we grew to enjoy it. Then we did so much of it that we grew to get fed up with it 😞 But everybody goes through stages in business and stages in life.

So which one area, right now, has the best potential for you to spend little bits of time on, maybe a couple of hours a week, or a little bit of time each day, when you are in between projects?

Should you send letters, or emails to prospective clients?

What's the best use of your marketing time right now? (letters, emails, postcards, phone calls?)

In my opinion, it's building *your own*...



...web site, **if done right.**

I personally think the best use of your time right now is to make or work on your own web site – to get your wares out there in the public view. Please also note that ProZ.com platinum membership includes free web hosting. All you pay for is the registration of your own domain name (\$10 a year).

Those of you who are *tranfree* subscribers (<http://www.tranfree.com/tranfree.html>) will probably have read something about these principles that I'm going to talk about. But that's fine, it bears repeating. And if you build your web site based on these principles, you won't go far wrong.

So, how do we do it right?

That's where my 7 Principles come in...

- 1) Show them that you care
- 2) People identify with those who identify with them
- 3) Trusting equals trustworthy
- 4) Give before you receive
- 5) Tell the truth, but tell it well
- 6) Use a win-win business model
- 7) If you're committed to your clients, they'll be committed to you

1-4 are about credibility and trustworthiness
6 & 7 are about building long-term relationships
5 fits about half and half into both categories

1. Show Them That You Care

- Case Studies
- Easy, intuitive site navigation

• Flash is not necessarily flashy

Having your own web site is more than just making an online CV. It's much more than that. It's an opportunity to showcase examples of your work, to answer customer queries, basically to show off. It's also an opportunity to show that you have the relevant IT skills. Because if you have the ability to put together a web site that works smoothly and well, you needed some computer knowledge and ability to produce it. Even though it is possible to buy in those skills, it still gives the impression of professionalism if you do.

With the web content, you have to tread a fine line between being too "me me me" egotistical – "all about us aren't we marvelous." People want to read about how you can **solve their problems**, what you can do for **them**. One of the best ways of doing this is case studies. Examples of how your translation work helped a business. The truth is, you may not know how your translations have helped a business. So try and get some precious feedback from clients. Feedback from clients is quite rare and difficult to get, but it can be worth it if you persist. A good testimonial and case study is worth its weight in gold. There's only so much nice stuff you can write about yourself. It carries more weight and looks much better if someone else is saying nice things about you.

You don't want to bore your site visitors to death, but you don't want to entertain them too much either. After all, your site is there to make a sale, or at least pave the way for one. It's not a multimedia experience, it's a...



...**sales presentation**. There's nothing to stop you using multimedia if you have the skills to do it well, but so many people clearly don't. A lot of people these days are doing sophisticated shockwave flash presentations that really are not very intuitive and easy to navigate around, and

they just make things hard for the users. They're inflexible and people get frustrated and give up. I give up browsing sites like that because they're a pain to use.

It's a part of **principle 1 Show them that you care**. Make it easy to navigate around the site. Make it easy for them to find the information that they want. Make life easy for your clients and prospective clients.

2. People Identify With Those Who Identify With Them.

- not deadly serious about deadlines
- unable to do work well enough
- not following instructions
- a pain to deal with
- breaching confidentiality
- nicking clients
- spoiling the market (show of hands)

If you have somebody who understands what your problems are, what things really wind you up about hiring freelance translators, then you can make sure that your business is structured to avoid those things. So what are the things you think that wind up translation agency project managers about freelance translators...

- not taking deadlines seriously – you’d be amazed at how much of that there is about (not as much as there used to be, but when I first got into this business, some people were very lax about deadlines)
- people taking on work that they are not qualified to do (classic beginners mistake, we’ve all done it and paid the price), or not able to do well enough, which is much more important than paper qualifications
- not following instructions
- being rude or difficult to understand on the telephone. If your native language is different from the language of your client, if your verbal communication is not up to scratch. i.e. if it is difficult for them to understand you, or you don’t speak into the phone, or you speak too quietly – if you make it hard for them in any way, you are unlikely to get much work from that client. It’s a communication issue in the communication industry. Some people get round this by doing it all by email. That’s fine if it works for you and the client.
- not keeping rates high when dealing direct with clients and spoiling the market, have different rates for agencies and direct clients
- breaching confidentiality. Doesn’t happen very often. But occasionally you get highly sensitive material, such as bids for building power stations etc.
- trying to pinch clients

All of these things will really wind up project managers and put them off you. So if you are able to make them realize that you know they hate all of these things, and that you always strive to avoid doing all of these things. They will relate to you. They will see that you understand their problems, and they’ll think...

“this person’s really thought about their approach to business and it’s credible and trustworthy, and I like it”

...that’s the key to all good marketing – understand your client. Understand **what’s going on...**



...inside their head.

You know what I'm doing when I write a web page? It's incredibly difficult to write a web page to sell something to somebody – to get people to part with their money in order to get what it is that you're offering. In order to achieve that, you have to get right inside the client's head. You have to understand what makes them tick. Understand why they would want what you're offering, why they would want to buy your services. What is it about your services that makes you a better choice than the next one on the list?

If you show them clearly that you understand all of their problems, and all of the problems that they may have had with other people. And that you set out from the first instance to avoid all of those – they're going to feel really good about that. It's going to make you look professional and trustworthy as well. You can even offer to let them to test you [*as Mats Wiman suggested at the talk.*]

3. Trusting = Trustworthy

- file encryption system
- TCR, Blue Board, payment practices

I had an email a few years ago from someone who was marketing a product “for translators” apparently, that was basically some system that enabled you to lock out files – basically an encryption system package. This meant you could prevent clients from being able to open and access files. He was telling me, although I didn't believe a word of it, that he had had a client that had ripped

him off, so he was using this system now and was only telling clients the password to open their files, once they had paid him. *[This got a few laughs from the floor.]*

This totally didn't ring true with me because it quite simply is not how the translation world works. You send your files, and you get paid some weeks later (usually). If the clients couldn't evaluate and open and look at the files, there's **no trust there**. It's not how the industry works at all.

A lot of new translators write to me asking whether such and such an agency is a bad one...

“coz I did a job for them 3 weeks ago and they haven't paid me yet”
[Lots of laughs]

...it always makes me laugh because people just don't know how the world works. And this guy didn't either, which is why I'm pretty sure none of you will have ever heard of his product. I can't even remember what it was called. In any event, if you want to encrypt a file you can use the Word password encryption feature and it doesn't cost you anything. These things are all built in to Word and Excel these days. But why would you want to encrypt a client's file unless they asked you to for security reasons?

If you don't have any trust in your clients, why on earth would they want to trust you? **People do...**



... **judge others** by their own standards and so if you are prepared to trust others, they will trust you. You do have to be careful who you take work from, that's why we've got payment practices, TCR and the blue board. There are some scum out there in fact, in this very city, there's a company called ***** translations run by *** *****. She owes us £300 outstanding for nearly 2 years. There are 2 other instances of non-payment from this agency in the Blue Board. It's probably about time I sent the boys around. ☺ Or just start proceedings to bankrupt her. Bottom line is, if you don't trust a client, don't work for them.

You can be sure that if they don't trust you to do a good job, they won't hire you. But that's what your web site's there to do, to convince them that you've got enough experience and ability to do a good job, and that you're trustworthy. Which leads me on to...

4. Give Before You Receive

- Package of information
- Train and educate your clients
- Translation itself
- Filter out the weeds

Because if you've given them a package of information regarding your services. And it educates them in how to choose a good translator, or something useful, information-wise. Then they will identify with you (principle 2) and trust you (principle 3).

You've made the effort already to write your web site. All of this takes time to do it well. And some of it can be a little bit boring. But what you have to understand is that this is all a part of giving before you receive. Where you're at now with your business, is the result of all the marketing you've done so far to date. If things have slowed down, you need to do more marketing work to pick it up again. If things are manic, you may feel that you don't want to do any more marketing work for the time being. That's fine, you're allowed to take a break. It's up to you, but eventually things will slow, and you'll need to pick it up again.

I tend to find that whenever I do marketing, I tend to almost immediately get some work based on previous marketing. I don't know if others have the same experience? You've got to remember the goal of your site. One possible site

goal would be to get people who are interested in having a document translated in your language combinations; to get them to read and understand what's involved in the process (without scaring them off) to educate them in what to expect when doing business with you, and to convince them that you are the one for the job. To convince them to phone you to discuss pricing, or some other job specific details.

You may choose to **deal with...**



...pricing on the web site, that's up to you. But the goal is to get the qualified lead to phone you in a ready-to-order frame of mind. Pricing is always going to be a bone of contention because there's very few people out there who are willing to take a long-term perspective. Usually people want stuff done the cheapest – that's where bidding sites come into their own. 😊 But there are people out there – the clients you're interested in picking up – who do understand that quality costs money and who are willing to pay for the best.

I'm into carpentry at the moment, and in the last couple of years I've spent a fair bit on tools – probably about £500-600 and I've had several purchases where I've bought cheap tools. Certain sorts of clamps, you can get cheap ones for a pound, or really good top-end ones for £20. The cheap ones can cause problems and even be dangerous – sometimes they can slip off. If you're using them for something critical, like to hold something to keep your fingers protected from a router or saw blade. Moral – don't use cheap translations in areas where safety is an issue.

Another carpentry example. I bought myself a cheap router. It had a high spec but it cost me 60 quid and broke quickly. So I sent it back and bought myself a top-notch one for 200 quid.

It's much nicer, I love using it and I don't regret it at all. Fortunately, I was able to send the first one back and get a refund, since it's covered by consumer law. But in business, there are no such refunds. So if people get cheap translations done, they will end up paying twice.

You are looking for those customers who are willing to pay a quality premium from the start.

How do you get them to be in this frame of mind?

5. Tell The Truth, But Tell It Well

- Focus on positives
- Don't talk about what you can't do
- Keep attention on solving client problems

I get quite a lot of email from freelancers and I'm often amazed that they spend half of the time telling me what they can't do, how little experience they've got and basically give completely the wrong impression.

Instead of saying "I don't do commercial documents," it's better to focus on something you do do. What about saying, "I specialize in literary translation?"

Be positive – we can learn from the Americans here.



Cheap cameras used to be called '**fixed focus**', but a few years ago this was turned from a minus to a plus by a clever marketer. Now they're called '**focus free**'. Turning focusing into a tiresome burden that you

don't want to bother with, instead of thinking of the limitations of not being able to change the focus.

That's what you've got to do with your services. Find ways of saying things in a positive way. But stick to the truth. It's called spin – and Tony Blair's rather good at it. The great thing about selling on the web rather than by phone is that, although you have to think it through carefully, you don't have to learn it, remember it, recite it. When someone calls you out of the blue, it's much harder to be that positive when you're thinking on your feet. Lay it all out on the web and convince people of your positives that way. It's less embarrassing too, if you're not all that good about tooting your own horn.

If there are negative things, like lack of experience etc. it's best to divert attention away from that and towards something positive. It's not lying, it's not wrong. Why emphasize your negatives? Of course, you shouldn't take work that you can't do well enough, but don't turn clients away before they even have a chance to hire you. You want the work, and you want them to gain from it so they can hire you again. This brings me onto Principle 6, which is...

6. Use A Win-Win Business Model

- Everyone has to gain
- Understand agencies (clients)
- The price is right

You want your clients to have good quality work done by you. You want them to pay you decent rates, so you've got to deliver the goods. You've got to do it well. They've got to get something out of the deal. If you're charging them a lot of money and you're not delivering the product, or you're doing it late, or not to their specifications, and they don't actually get something out of the deal, then it's one-sided.

It's got to be two-sided. Everybody's got to benefit from the relationship, **or there will be no relationship**. So you have to make sure that you leave room for the next guy. Everyone has to make a profit on it. That's where a lot of freelancers don't understand the value in agencies. Agencies spend a lot of their time marketing and getting work, and trying to build volume. They spend money on advertising, they spend their time going round talking to companies, and marketing. And yes, a lot of agencies are just file handlers, and customer handlers – but they do keep the customers off your backs so you can get on with what you're good at, which is translating.

So if the agency whacks 100% margin on top of what you get what do you care? Why should you be worried about that? They're the ones who've managed to sell it for that price. Some translators are appalled at the prospect of agencies doubling the price of what they get. Some people think that a decent agency commission would be about 10%. Well get real, it's not the way at all. That would be a loss-making proposition for the agency.

We haven't sub-contracted any work for maybe 3 years now. We don't want to be involved in that any more. But when we did, we tried to double what we were being charged, or find a cheaper translator (who was good enough). There's nothing wrong with trying to make a decent margin. The agency is a business too. They have to make a profit, or they won't be able to give you any work in the future. It's all about the long term. Which leads me to principle 7...

7. If You're Committed To Your Clients, They'll Be Committed To You.

- Be nice
- Go the extra mile
- Put yourself out for clients
- Build the relationship

• Make it personal

Commitment to your clients. Go the extra mile. Do that extra formatting and chuck it in as a bonus. Do good things. Be nice to them. Send them a Christmas card at Christmas. Have chats with them. If you feel they want to talk, spend time building the relationship. But don't waste their time. Try to be sensitive and understand what they're looking for in the relationship and give it to them and a little bit more. If you can always give them a little bit more than they're expecting – if they're really stressed and they want a deadline met – even if it's a tough one. Try to not just meet it, but to beat it. Try to get your job in a little early to relieve their stress. Believe me, these little things make a big difference.

I used to have a little secret. Whenever I sent an invoice, I would write something personal to the **project manager on...**



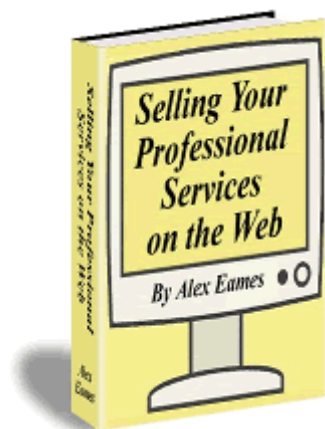
...a little yellow sticky. It's not a secret any more, coz I just told you. I've never published that before. But you know what? Clients love that personal touch. Make a bond between you and the client, and you'll assure the future of your business. You'll assure that you get selected for the work – even if you are more expensive than some of the others. You'll have proved that you are worth it. Be committed and show your commitment. Be available when they need you.

Maybe you hate a particular kind of job, but once in a while, help a client out when they are stuck. They'll appreciate it. Just be there for them and they'll be there for you, and the work will keep coming in, and you'll be alright.

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I hope you liked my talk. If you did, you will probably like some of my other work. Here are some links to *translatortips.com* products and offerings...



Selling Your Professional Services on the Web, ebook
<http://translatortips.net/sell-your-services.html>

7 Principles for Successful Web Marketing of Services

32 page Free report, which is chapter 1 of Selling Your Professional Services on the Web. This supplements today's talk.

<http://translatortips.net/7principles.pdf>

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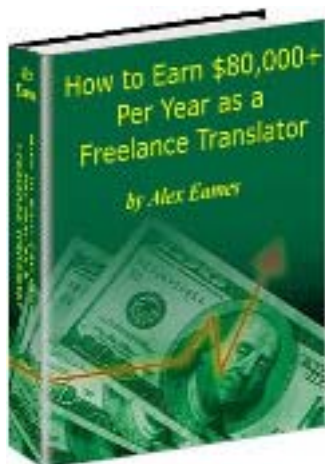
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