Letter from the Editor – the private market makes the headlines


Antonio GARZON JOLI.
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We can safely assume that anyone reading these pages will have a pretty clear idea about what the International Association of Conference Interpreters is and does.

The term "sector" requires some explanation for those unfamiliar with AIIC jargon. A sector brings together interpreters - AIIC members - who share a common interest; for example it may comprise colleagues who work as freelances for a major international organisation. Their terms and conditions are codified in an agreement or convention negotiated between AIIC and their employer. If you look at the AIIC website you'll certainly come across articles about or references to the UN and European Union sectors.

The "private market" covers all interpreting work where the contractual terms and remuneration are negotiated individually between the interpreter (who may be represented by a consultant interpreter) and the client organising the event. This organiser may be the person arranging the multilingual event at which the interpreter is to provide a service, or may be an intermediary entrusted by the end user with recruiting the interpreter or interpreters.

Is there a Private Market Sector?

The sharp-eyed reader (as you all are) will have realised that it is rather contradictory to speak of a "sector" when referring to activities pursued outside the protective structure of an agreement establishing in advance the level of pay, allowances and payment deadlines. Private market clients not governed by an agreement do not make contributions to pension or sickness funds.

And yet.

The Private Market Sector is by far the biggest within the International Association of Conference Interpreters in terms of interpreters active in it, the number of interpreter days it generates and its geographic spread. As a community of interest it is also one of the Association's most dynamic sectors, as shown by the success of its six-monthly meetings. These meetings provide a forum where freelance interpreters from throughout the world meet and share their experience and good practice in different areas such as dealing with clients and professional conference organisers, professional and ethical standards, or indeed the future of the profession.

The sector has a Standing Committee whose main task is to do all it can to ensure the continuity of the ongoing discussions in what remains by definition a very diverse sector.
Whether you're an AIIC member or not, whether you're an interpreting student or just an occasional browser on aiic.net, I trust that reading about the experience of a consultant interpreter on the idiosyncratic Israeli market or about the factors affecting the cost of conference interpreters will help familiarize you with this sector.

We hope you enjoy a good read.

This issue

Have you ever wondered about fixed costs, variable costs and the effective "productive time" available to you as a freelancer? Risks such as disability and sickness? A nest egg to sit on when you reach a certain age? Julia Böhm's Budgeting time and costs for professional conference interpreters takes a long look at these and other matters.

These days some people advocate emotional accounting as a way to better understand how things work. In this issue Phil Smith chirps in with People skills to remind us that the busy linguist should play nicely - and that rewards may await.

For the interpreter who aspires to have clients - and regular ones at that - building good relationships will be crucial. "We know how we do our job, but many of us are just unable to put this into words for our clients," says Julia Poger. Read more in The give and take of a client relationship (for beginners).

"It is said that interpreters do not like to interpret videoconferences, and you may wonder why." Well, yes actually, and we thank Jean Pierre Allain for expounding on the matter in Interpretation at videoconferences - what's the big deal?

How do all these ideas pan out in practice, face-to-face with the elusive client? When and why does a freelance interpreter decide to become a consultant interpreter? Should one go it alone or join a group? You can read Jean-Christophe Pierret's reasons and reactions in De l'autre côté du miroir: le point de vue d'un nouveau venu dans la profession d'interprète-conseil sur le marché privé belge. And for more go on to Ella Bar Illan & Ayeleth Nirpaz's A glimpse into the life of a consultant interpreter in Israel.

After an extended break, Phil Smith is back with Off mic to tell us about the Private Market Sector's latest get-together where he met up with other "keepers of the pioneering spirit, rugged riders of the high plains, waders of foaming rivers and masters of the past subjunctive."

We round-off this issue with a quick trip to Brussels: "Crossroads of Europe, indecision-making centre of the European Union, Brussels must no doubt hold the dubious honour of giving shelter to the highest number of interpreters per square kilometre in the universe." See Carlos Ameller's A Brussels Sprout View of Interpretation for the full story.

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