

Best Face Forward: In-person marketing Skills for T&I Professionals

By Diane E. Teichman ©2003

AFTER YOU'VE MAILED YOUR RÉSUMÉ to a thousand agencies, sent out brochures detailing your services, or paid dearly for a display advertisement, how else can you market your services? Consider meeting potential clients in person. After all, some of the greatest business relationships in the world were initiated person-to-person. Here are a few steps to finding your most desirable clients in person, while making a great first impression.

Start with an outline of what kind of clients you want to develop. Then identify places where they gather to network, such as their trade associations. You will find the same networking opportunities they do there. You can identify these by the titles of the people that hire you or the name of their profession. Often there are local divisions of national associations listed in the telephone book by their title under "Association." Sometimes they break down into gender (Association of Women Engineers) or even race. Do you want more exposure to people who would hire you to translate engineering material? Look to the American Council of Engineering Companies. Do you want more work in medical translation or interpreting? Look up the local chapter of the American Academy of Medical Administrators. You can also find the non-competitive professions that are seeking the same people you are. If you are a literary translator, authors are also in the market for publishers. Are you a legal interpreter? Videographers and court reporters are always soliciting law firms. Every international association is a source of work for conference interpreters. I have listed a few as an example for you [see sidebar]. You will need to verify if they welcome guests at their meetings, lectures, or Programs. Another option is attending one of their fundraisers or social functions.

Before you go, do your homework. The more relevant your services are to the people you will meet, the more you can maximize their receptiveness of what you have to offer. On the web you can learn about the association and the profession. Target meeting people who will have the power to contract, hire, or recommend you.

Prepare yourself for the face-to-face meeting. In almost any business or social situation, in the course of a person-to-person introduction, you have between 45 and 60 seconds to capture the interest of the person you are meeting. First impressions are comprised of your appearance and the

initial information received about you and from you, in other words, how you are introduced and what you say about yourself. For purposes of this article let's focus on clients for the translation and interpreting professions.

Professional translators and interpreters often face the burden of an uneducated market. Our clients don't always know how we work or what we do even if it is critical to their own profession. I have found the best way to conquer this problem is to learn as much as possible about my client's work and responsibilities. This allows easier conversation with a potential client besides impressing them.

The initial information received about you in the introduction is critical, whether you are being introduced or are introducing yourself. You can capture their interest to learn more about you just as you can with the first words you place in your display advertisement of your services or the first few lines of your résumé. They need to know your name and what service you provide. Since you are still in that 45- to 60-second window, inform them of your services. Even the catchiest company name won't tell them that you are capable of the work. Compare these two introductions:

"Hello, I'm Robert Waterman with Around the World Incorporated."

"Hello my name is Robert Waterman; I'm a professional science and technology conference interpreter."

It is then natural for them to comment on what you've said. In the latter introduction it will be about your profession as it relates to them. This potential client will either mention how his business employs people like you, such as his last experience with a conference interpreter, or if they don't recognize the profession he or she will ask you for more information.

Be careful to avoid the lethal introduction; when someone introduces you and misstates your services. Picture this scenario. Here you are, already employed as the senior translation project manager at a major company, but you are in the market for a better position. A former student of yours from the "make ends meet" days when you taught is about to introduce you to the human resource director of a Fortune 500 corporation. Imagine the damage done if you are introduced only as his former Spanish teacher. The 60 seconds are gone and you cannot tactfully correct this person doing you this great favor. I suggest avoiding this by briefly reminding your host with the exact wording of your expertise and goal: "I really appreciate your introducing us,



as I am looking to move on from my translation project manager job at XYZ company.”

If the potential client then expresses an interest in your work, remember to be brief and considerate of their time. Your progress in achieving your goal can be measured by every subsequent question they ask about your work. Design a maximum ten-word, single-sentence description of your key services to start with. Offer your business card as you are speaking, and ask for that person's card. If you've done your homework and know about the company, then show interest in their work and company. Don't tell them about their work, such as why they suffer failures in translation or interpreting. Let them be the expert.

When you are asked about your work, avoid personal aggrandizement. Calling yourself or your company the best, the oldest, or the largest begs a challenge to the claim. Measure their interest in what you are saying by watching their body language and ensuing questions. Only offer to send them more information or to meet with them if they express such an interest. It really stings to be told “No thank you, I'm not interested” in person. You can contact them a few days later if you are not sure about their interest. Whenever the conversation moves away from you or your services, be polite and don't bring it up again. You may have made a good impression already, and trying to refocus on yourself would demolish that progress.

Before you go, put your business card to the professional litmus test. There is nothing more unprofessional than a cluttered business card. It should be limited to the company name, your name, address, phone number, email, and website. If necessary, a description of services should be limited to a maximum of five words. A tagline under your logo serves the same purpose. Adding the acronyms for professional memberships are a good sign of your dedication to your work. Physical addresses are less mandatory as contact information in today's cyberworld, so removing this can free up space on your card.

You are now armed with the right appearance, the right script, and the right approach. Now go out and get those clients! ★

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People who should know you!

International Association of Business Communicators
www.iabc.com

National Court Reporters Association
www.verbatimreporters.com

Association of Consumer Research
www.acrweb.org

American Academy of Medical Administrators
www.aameda.org

Public Relations Society of America
www.prsa.org/_Chapters/main

List of hospital associations by state
www.pohly.com/assoc.html

Society for Technical Communication
<http://stc.org>
Seven chapters in Texas
http://stc.org/chapter/chapter_results.asp

Texas Hospital Association
www.thaonline.org

Texas Court Reporters Association
Four chapters www.tcra-online.com/locals.htm

International Women's Writing Guild
www.iwwg.com

Legal Assistant Management Association www.lamanet.org
Two chapters in Texas www.lamanet.org/lama/lamanet.asp?linkID=73&heading=LAMA+Chapter

National Federation of Paralegal Associations
www.paralegals.org

Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Inc.
www.sfwaw.org

American Institute of Chemical Engineers
www.aiche.org

American Council of Engineering Companies
www.acec.org

Public Relations Society of America
www.prsa.org/_Chapters/main
Eight chapters in Texas
www.prsa.org/_Chapters/find/index.asp?state=Texas#Texas