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#### MISSION STATEMENT

To provide information and service to our members, and to improve the relationships between translation companies and freelance translators through activities that recognize we are “in association” with each other.

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*TCD News* is the newsletter of the TCD. Readers are encouraged to submit articles, which are subject to editing. Articles reflect the opinions of the authors only, and do not represent the views or opinions of the editor or officers of the TCD.

#### TCD ADMINISTRATOR

Kim Vitray  
McElroy Translation, Austin, TX  
512-472-6753  
[vitray@mcelroytranslation.com](mailto:vitray@mcelroytranslation.com)

#### TCD ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR

Ellen Boyar  
Thomson Scientific, Philadelphia, PA  
215-386-0100  
[ellen.boyar@thomson.com](mailto:ellen.boyar@thomson.com)

#### TCD NEWS EDITOR

Tova Ichai  
MilaTova International Translations  
Tel-Aviv, Israel  
972-3-5245035  
[milatova@netvision.net.il](mailto:milatova@netvision.net.il)

#### WEBMASTER

Evan Norman  
McElroy Translation, Austin, TX  
512-472-6753  
[evan@mcelroytranslation.com](mailto:evan@mcelroytranslation.com)



# Vendor Selection and Management

By Judy Abrahams

*“Success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure.”  
Confucius (Chinese teacher, philosopher, and political theorist, 551-479 BC)*

Anyone who undertakes a project, regardless of its size or nature (personal or secular), does so with the hope that, at its completion, the project is overall successful. As indicated by the wise words of Confucius, such success depends on preparation. The same rings true for translation projects. Proper preparation and planning are essential.

Interestingly, project managers would readily agree that, regardless of the field, a principal part of preparation involves these basic steps:

- Define the project
- Plan the project
- Manage the work
- Close the project

Generally speaking, therefore, for any project to be successful, it is imperative that the project manager be able to efficiently manage the key components of the project, namely, 1) the scope (size, goals); 2) the resources (in this case the vendors); 3) time; and 4) money.

In the translation business, a project manager coordinates projects for clients, from start to finish. This means that the project manager, although not directly involved in the actual translation, must establish the necessary steps and procedures to ensure an efficient, accurate, and timely translation process. This includes, among other things, contracting and overseeing team members and vendors until the project is completed and delivered to the client.

In light of the foregoing, it is understandable why one of the critical components of a project manager's duties is vendor selection and management. Hence, when selecting vendors, it is very important to make

sure that the right people with the right skills are contracted. A clear advantage of selecting the best qualified, most experienced, and skilled vendor is that the project manager can often compensate for too little time or money or other constraints.

## Vendors

Who are classified as translation vendors? A vendor is the:

**Translator:** translates from the written source text provided by the client to the target language, ensuring that the translated text is as faithful to the source text and format as possible.

**Interpreter:** listens to spoken words in the source language and repeats the same message/meaning in the target language. This may be done either as consecutive or simultaneous interpreting.

**Editor:** edits the translation, confirms that it is complete, and verifies the consistency of terms and adherence to references or glossaries provided.

**Proofreader:** ensures that all the text is faithfully reproduced, including proper nouns, dates, addresses, and other aspects.

**Typesetter:** is responsible for laying out the approved translation in the client-supplied source layout file.

Clearly, vendors are an important element of any project. Since they are valuable resources, they should be treasured and treated with utmost respect.

Given the importance of their role, it is instructive to consider a few factors relating to the selection of appropriate vendors. Following are a few skills to consider when contracting vendors:

### Translators and Editors:

- Be native speakers
- Have subject area expertise
- Have the ability to analyze the

source document and adapt the text for the target language

- Be current on technology
- Be willing to do basic research that may be required for the project
- Produce accurate and complete translations, while adhering to deadlines
- Deliver on time and report any potential delays as soon as they become aware of them

### Proofreaders:

- Be able to focus on details
- Have knowledge of the target language

### Typesetters:

- Have good knowledge of typesetting in foreign languages
- Have the appropriate software applications

### Interpreters:

- Be good public speakers
- Have the ability to analyze meaning quickly and flawlessly convert the same message/meaning into the target language

## Finding the Right Vendor

No one specific place exists to find good translators. Therefore, in selecting vendors, it is helpful to bear in mind these factors:

- Several institutions offer degrees and certificates in translation. Note, however, that although academic training is essential in developing a translator's basic skills, real life experience is invaluable.
- Several translation organizations based in the United States and overseas, such as the American Translators Association (ATA), the Chartered Institute of Linguistics (IOL), the Association of Translators, and Interpreters of Ontario (ATIO), among others, are good places to network.
- Many of these translation organizations have established certifica-



tion programs to enable translators to demonstrate that they meet professional standards. Passing a certification or accreditation examination serves as evidence of a translator's professional competence.

- In other words, besides formal education in translation, years of experience, a well-developed knowledge of one or more specialized fields, and good writing style, certification from a recognized organization such as the ATA, although not mandatory, is a plus.

Most translation agencies maintain databases with vital information on vendors, keeping records on those who have participated in previous projects. Hence, it is very important for vendor managers to ensure that vendor information is current. One effective way for an agency to increase vendors in the database is by seeking references from existing translators. In addition, when résumés are received from new vendors, they may be added to the database. It is advisable, however, to do an evaluation or test to confirm the new vendor's competence. If possible, the vendor may be tested on a small project. As expected, verifying the qualifications of vendors is crucial.

**Vendor Management**

In any relationship, communication is the lifeline. Therefore, it is important to provide vendors with all the relevant project instructions and details, putting them in writing and sending them via email. Vendors should be provided with a concise description of the project with the word count and the exact task that they should perform, since some vendors may offer multiple services, especially with regard to translation and editing. Be sure to include the language pair (source language into target language) since some vendors work with different

language pairs. Most importantly, vendors must be informed of the deadline, that is, the day, date, and hour with the relevant time zone so as to avoid confusion.

Written communication should be sent to the vendor outlining the aforementioned points once the vendor has confirmed his or her availability for the job. At this point, the vendor should be provided with the source file(s), project specifications, any reference materials or glossaries, and the corresponding purchase order.

Having selected the vendors for the project, it is important to remember that each vendor has his or her own rates. Therefore, it would be helpful to keep standard rates on file to make it easier to reduce the time spent on negotiating rates. Generally, rates can be negotiated and vary depending on the service required. For instance, a vendor may lower his or her rate on certain projects. If there is a rush job or one that is particularly complex, then the vendor may charge a higher rate. The foregoing notwithstanding, the project manager should clarify any change of rates at the beginning of the project and issue the relevant purchase order at the rate agreed.

In order to protect the confidentiality of information, agencies should require all vendors to sign a confidentiality or nondisclosure agreement. All vendors are also required to complete the relevant tax forms that are necessary for payment to be issued. Therefore, all paperwork should be completed prior to sending a job to a vendor.

Famous American inventor, journalist, diplomat, and statesman Benjamin Franklin once said, "Remember that time is money." In an industry driven by deadlines, time is most precious. Therefore, it is vital to save time by selecting the right vendors with the right skills to get the job completed accurately and on time.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that vendor selection and management is just as critical to the success of the project as is risk management or controlling costs.

**Reference**

Project Management for Translation, New York University



Judy Abrahams holds the Certificate in Translation from New York University, and has done additional coursework in Translation. She is an Associate Member of the American Transla-

tors Association with nearly two decades of translation experience in her native Jamaica, particularly in diplomacy and international relations. Her article entitled "To Be or Not to Be Certified—That Is the Question" has been published on the Language Realm. Judy can be reached at [transjam@yahoo.com](mailto:transjam@yahoo.com).

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# Student Syndrome

By Bob Donaldson

There is a well-known phenomenon in project management circles having to do with so-called "safety time." "Safety time" is the amount by which we all pad our task completion estimates to account for the reality of uncertainty. Uncertainty can come in the form of unexpected difficulties, interruptions, last-minute "minor" changes, etc. Of course, we should expect that sometimes this uncertainty would work in our favor, as well; a task would be unexpectedly easy, or we would breeze through an entire morning of uninterrupted productivity. And that's where the phenomenon I am referring to comes into play. It is often expressed as follows: **Delays in one task are always passed along to the next task in the chain, but time saved in a single task is almost always lost.**

Why does this so often hold? One reason, of course, is that when everyone is tightly scheduled, it may not be possible for the next person to start his or her task early, but this does not adequately explain the situation. Boiling down a lot of research, we end up right where we probably should have started in the first place...human nature. How does this work? Let's look at the typical sequence of events:

- I am asked for a time estimate to complete a task. If I have an appropriate amount of experience, I will have a pretty good idea of the kinds of challenges the task may present and the range of potential task durations I might expect. But that is not the end of my estimating process.
- I also need to take into account my other workload, the likelihood that I will be interrupted, etc. Now I have a somewhat longer estimate, one that we might refer to as an "average predicted duration." But there is more.
- What is the penalty (in terms of customer disappointment or manager disapproval) if I am late? Again,

experience tells me that it is better to "under promise and over deliver"...and please do not get me started on that overused cliché! This leads to a final estimate that we probably have an 80% or better chance of achieving.

- So why don't we finish early most of the time? Precisely because we know that we have built in "safety time." Someone interrupts with a business problem? Glad to help! I've got time. Someone drops by to share pictures of their granddaughter? No problem! I've got time. A new message pops up in my email inbox? Plenty of time to knock out a quick reply. After all, this task isn't due until 4:00 p.m. And sure enough, a burst of energy beginning at 3:40 and we finish right on time. Unless, of course, that unexpected difficulty shows up at 3:45.

This behavior pattern is so common that it has received its own name in the literature: Student Syndrome. Student Syndrome is the practice of pacing ourselves so that we finish our "assignments" right on time (but never early). We probably all recognize ourselves in this description as it applies to student years, but are we as aware of our current tendency to pace ourselves as we should be? Probably not. Thankfully, though, there are some approaches to counteracting Student Syndrome that can help.

First, as individuals we should have the discipline to set aggressive targets for ourselves and then strive to hit them. These targets should be realistic, but optimistic with respect to uncertainties. The idea is that if we fall a little short of an aggressive target, that may be much better than achieving a target set with too much built-in safety time.

Second, as an organization we should support aggressive targets. There should still be accountability around missed targets, but like the "degree of difficulty" component of diving or

gymnastics scoring systems, we should reward staff members who consistently strive for high goals.

And lastly, those with responsibility for setting customer expectations—project managers, sales staff, etc.—should *continue to make use of safety time!* By factoring safety time out of the individual tasks and aggregating it into a "buffer," we accomplish two things:

- We reduce the overall estimated length of the chain of tasks, because it is reasonable to believe that some of the uncertainties will cancel each other out.
- We protect the end customer from the impact of a delayed task, because we have a single project-level buffer to absorb those delays.

This approach to project management and productivity optimization is part of a way of looking at business processes called "Theory of Constraints." For those with more interest, you might want to look at this website: [www.dbrmfg.co.nz](http://www.dbrmfg.co.nz). For all of us, though, we might work at "redeeming the time" by finishing early whenever possible, rather than being satisfied with meeting a generous deadline.



Bob Donaldson is VP of Strategy at McElroy Translation in Austin, TX. He can be reached at [bobd@mcelroytranslation.com](mailto:bobd@mcelroytranslation.com)

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# *"Deep in the Heart of Translation Trends"*

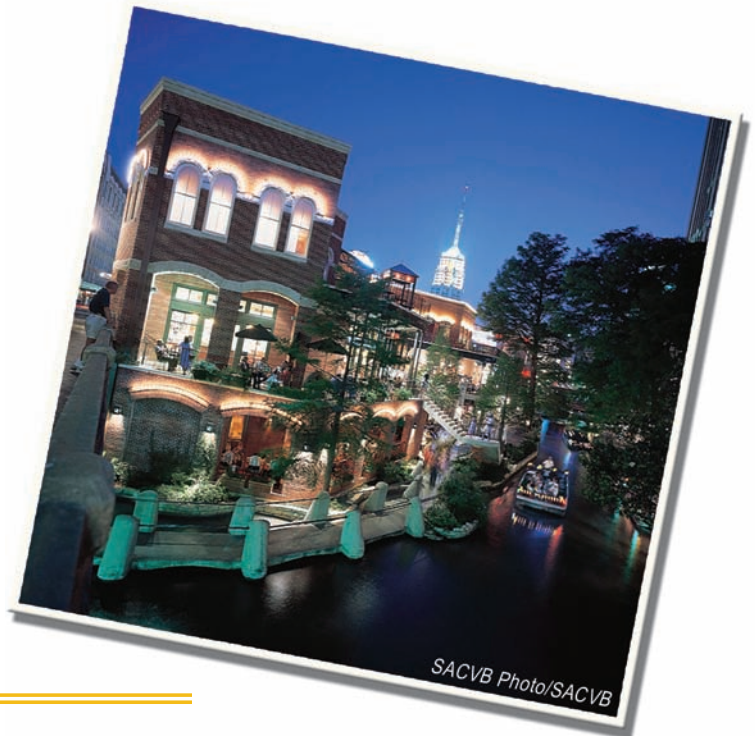
## **8th Annual Conference**

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Translation Company Division - American Translators Association  
July 26-29, 2007 - Hyatt Regency, San Antonio, TX, USA

### **Highlights:**

- Thursday evening reception and banquet
- Two days (Friday and Saturday) of informative educational sessions tailored to the needs and concerns of translation company owners and managers
- Topics will focus on workflow technology and project management
- Plenty of time and opportunity for networking, networking, and more networking!
- Optional Friday or Saturday evening activity exploring the sounds and flavors of San Antonio ([www.sanantoniocvb.com](http://www.sanantoniocvb.com))
- Sunday morning buffet breakfast



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Kim Vitray  
TCD Administrator  
[vitray@mcelroytranslation.com](mailto:vitray@mcelroytranslation.com)  
512-472-6753



Ellen Boyar  
TCD Assistant Administrator  
[ellen.boyar@thomson.com](mailto:ellen.boyar@thomson.com)  
215-386-0100 ext. 1331