METM19 Chronicles: Jenny Zonneveld

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Preparing the winning quote – effective job estimates

Bidding for translation or editing jobs can be a tricky and sometimes stressful business so I was eager to pick up some useful tips in this session, presented by Jenny Zonneveld and prepared together with John Linnegar who, unfortunately, was unable to attend METM this year.

In her introduction, Jenny emphasized the importance of preparing a winning quote prior to taking on a job to prevent it from becoming a Pandora's box with various problems arising further down the line. This is true in my experience. I have had the unpleasant surprise in the past of additional website text materializing towards the end of the translation process and the client then claiming it was included in the original quote.

Jenny then spoke about the stages involved in preparing the quote, beginning with establishing what steps of work you are estimating in terms of time and cost, what your deliverables will be. She also outlined the workflow, from job preparation to aftercare, and potential extra client requests, pointing out that if you tell a client upfront what is or is not included in the price and they come back with additional work, you can charge extra for that.

Jenny also talked about the details of job preparation, including questions you may need to ask the client, such as who is the target audience of the text you will produce. She recommended having a checklist of possible tasks to save time when writing quotes, advice that has already proven useful to me personally.

It is worth taking the time to identify the full task when preparing your quote, including any diagrams or footnotes, for example.

If you are asked to do academic editing, you will need to establish what extra work is involved such as rearranging the order of appendices, for instance, or editing or revising an abstract, and ensure this is included in the price quoted, at an hourly rate. The editing price also depends on how light or heavy the edit is: John Linnegar has a method for determining this and has given valuable MET workshops on the subject. Jenny quite rightly emphasized the importance of not quoting sight unseen. Sometimes, however, the full text might not be available at the beginning of a project because the authors are still working on it. I have a few book edits like that currently in progress, but I was able to estimate a price on the basis of a draft version or available chapters.

As Jenny suggested, for a translation quote, it can be helpful to carry out a CAT tool analysis to determine the word count and internal repetitions for calculating the price on the basis of words, an hourly rate or a project price. One suggestion made was to offer translation with and without revision, giving two different prices. What has worked for teams I have been cooperating with recently has been to charge a line rate for translation (under the German system) and bill the client for editing of the translation separately at an hourly rate.

Jenny personally recommends project prices or an hourly rate for translations. There was a very interesting discussion at the end of the session on whether to bill translation or editing per word, per hour or per project and the consensus was: it depends on the particular project. Jenny concluded by advising us to quote a fair and honest price and value our services, not forgetting to consider the value the client would give our work.

All in all, this was an extremely useful session; my colleagues and I have already put some of the tips mentioned into practice in a recent quote. We spent a long time working on the bid until everyone on the team was satisfied but it paid off in the end. And it is reassuring to know that, although the process of preparing winning quotes can be very time-consuming, it is time well spent to avoid the risk of opening a Pandora's box of potential problems that could prove expensive to rectify at a later stage.

This METM19 presentation was chronicled by Linda Jayne Turner.