

Doing Business with Law Firms

by Paula Asturo



Doing Business with Law Firms Checklist

This checklist will give you an insider's perspective on what law firms look for when hiring translators. There's often a gap between what legal translators *think* matters to potential clients and what those potential clients actually want. The goal: **To help you fine-tune the details for doing business successfully with law firms.**

I'm here to share intelligence on what lawyers think puts the "pro" in professional, and what shows potential clients that you've stepped up your game and speak their language.

Once you have subject-matter knowledge and language expertise down to a science (and please do before you start marketing to law firms), you've set yourself up to get noticed. Now it's time to tweak your business model and truly set yourself apart from the pack.

Why This Is Important

When you're expanding your business and marketing to law firms, you need to be intentional not just about the soft side of marketing but also about the hard side of business, ensuring your business model is aligned with and hints at your professionalism and expertise.

Marketing will get potential clients' attention, but the details are where you will *earn their trust*. And this checklist is intended to help you get all the details right.

Three Benefits of the Doing Business with Law Firms Checklist

The goal of this checklist is to help you convey professionalism and expertise when doing business with law firms. Follow these easy steps and you will move into Big Law with ease and confidence. This checklist will:

Help You Earn Clients' Trust

We all know that legal translators aspire to translate for large law firms and that getting their attention isn't easy. A solid marketing campaign will put you on their radars, but once you're there, you want to make sure you convey professionalism and expertise, which will earn their trust. It's important to take care of the details that communicate to law firms that you speak their language. This way, they'll be ready and willing to invest time into understanding what you have to offer.

Help Lower the Cost of Doing Business with You

By the "cost of doing business with you," I **don't** mean your per word/hour/project fee. I mean the time, resources and money—in addition to what they're paying you to translate—that your client has to invest into doing business with you. If the cost of doing business with you is low, you become more attractive to work with, even if your per word/hour/project fee is high. If, for example, your client has to spend a lot of time figuring out your invoicing system or how to pay you, the cost of doing business with you might be too high to turn them into repeat clients. If on the other hand, you streamline the business side of things, the cost of doing business with you is lower, which translates into value for your clients. This is because the ease of doing business with you is perceived value, and that is a key component to the services industry in general that legal translators all too often neglect.

Help Prime the Pump

Your potential clients are lawyers. Lawyers have a good nose for nonsense. No matter how good your marketing campaign is, there are only two things that will build long-lasting and profitable relationships with them: 1) pristine translations and 2) the ease of doing business with you. You need to deliver value in every part of the translation process, including the business side of things. If you get that right, over time, your clients will appreciate your professionalism and you'll become their go-to translator for every project.

Doing Business with Law Firms Checklist

STEP 1: Get a custom domain name and secure email address

If there's one thing lawyers understand, it's the words "proprietary and confidential." We take this very seriously. No matter how great you sound on paper, if you're emailing us from a Gmail or Yahoo! account, we're likely to get the impression that you are not overly concerned with cybersecurity. So, make sure to have a custom domain name and a secure service available to send and receive sensitive data. Check that your service has end-to-end and zero access encryption. That ensures that your emails can't be shared with third parties, which is a significant concern for your clients. And if you think this stuff is expensive, it doesn't have to be. If you're just starting out and can't afford the fancier services just yet, look into free ones. There are some pretty good start-ups out there offering great services.

STEP 2: Get a standardized quotation template with key information (and respond within 24 hours)

One thing I've learned in my 20+ years in this business is that the early bird gets the worm. When law firms reach out asking for a quotation, they'll only really consider the candidates who respond quickly. And by quickly, I mean within 24 hours or less. After that, you're no longer a contender. Another interesting fact I've picked up in my recently acquired role at a top law firm is that very few translators actually respond quickly, if at all. Those who do but leave out key information rarely make the cut either. So be sure to provide a detailed description of the job at hand. Don't just write "translation," include language pairs, whether there will be DTP work involved, whether there's editing involved, whether editing is charged separately... really spell it out. This also helps remind clients of the *value* in the service you provide. Also don't forget to clearly display your company information, the client's details, the date, tax details (where applicable), and terms and conditions of service (see step 3).

STEP 3: Get professionally drafted Terms and Conditions of Service and attach them to your quotation

A few years ago, I conducted a survey that I later presented at the American Translators Association Conference in Miami where I found that over half of surveyed language professionals didn't have their own terms and conditions. I also found that even those who do are often reluctant to send them to clients. But if you're a legal translator marketing to lawyers, I'll let you in on a little secret: we not only won't squirm when you send us your T&Cs, we'll be wary about working with you if you don't. We expect you to be as protective of your business as we are of ours and anything short of that raises questions about whether or not we can trust you with our sensitive documents. But be warned, contract drafting is serious stuff. So don't do it yourself. As language professionals, we often tell people to leave translation to the pros. The same applies to contract drafting. Find a lawyer in your area who can draft the contract for you. If you can't afford a lawyer yet, hire an online attorney-drafted contract service. But whatever you do, don't just copy random clauses from other contracts or from the internet. There are important considerations to contract drafting that relate not just to

your domestic law, but to conflicts of law if you and your clients are in different countries, which is often the case for translators.

STEP 4: Get a standardized Project Specification Sheet template with key information

So you got the client. Congratulations! Before you reach for the champagne, take a few minutes to send your client a project specification sheet (PSS) to review before you get down to work. The PSS should be a single page that confirms key information about the project that you and the client may have agreed on by email or by phone beforehand or after they have accepted your quotation. Your PSS should be a brief summary of the details of the job and also include your terms: start date, end date, what happens if the client cancels after you've started working, whether you expect payment upon delivery or invoice, how many days after invoicing payment is due, how you expect to be paid and who will cover the transaction costs. All this information should already be in your quotation, terms and conditions, and in your communication with the client. The PSS is simply a one-page document that confirms all this succinctly in order to avoid misunderstandings that might arise in the future. And more importantly, to control who is liable for what.

STEP 5: Register your business

Whether you're doing business under your own name or a brand name, you'll need to register your business with local authorities. Whether that's federal, state, provincial or municipal will depend on where you are in the world. In some jurisdictions, registration and tax IDs are two separate things, in others they're one in the same. The important thing is that you're duly registered to do business wherever you are.

STEP 6: Get a business bank account and at least one online payment service

If you're in the U.S. and your clients are too, then you're used to working with checks. If your clients are in the U.S. and you are not, checks can be a problem. You need at least two alternative options to make it easy for your clients to pay you: have a business account to receive bank transfers and at least one online payment service so they can transfer money to you electronically. And make sure your PSS includes your SWIFT code for international transfers, your Routing Number for domestic transfers, and the email associated with your online payment service.



Paula Arturo is a lawyer, translator and Lecturer of Law.

Paula's been a translator for 20 years and her bragging rights include translating the works of Nobel Prize laureates and high profile authors and working as an independent lawyer-linguist for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of several Latin American States.

She is a linguistic consultant at Marval, O'Farrell & Mairal and managing partner at Translating Lawyers. Committed to the professionalization of translation and interpretation, she is administrator of the American Translators Association's Law Division and co-head of legal affairs at the International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters.

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