

Niche Marketing as a Strategy for Translators and Interpreters

By Memuna Williams



In my candidate statement for Vice President of CATI, I promised to continue to support the interests and concerns of professional translators and interpreters and to continue advocating for professional recognition. I can think of no better way to begin the New Year than by starting to follow through on those promises.

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Over the years and in different formats, I have talked about the tension between the work we do as translators and interpreters and the business issues we face and must address in order to provide our services. A recurring business concern among translators and interpreters is how to “market” themselves to the public. In recent months for example, several new certifications and forums have been introduced to make translators and interpreters more marketable.

Often, in order to address the concern of how to market translation and interpreting services, we are admonished to “find a niche” in which to work. The simplicity of this statement points to some basic, common sense behind the advice. At the same time, it raises question of what this really means. In the paragraphs below, I will briefly dis-

cuss what “finding a niche” means, and consider whether or not it is good advice.

One of the basic tenets of marketing is that a business must select and serve a target market. Before that can be done, the business must assess its capabilities and resources, and identify distinct groups of buyers that need its services. Identifying these distinct groups of buyers is done through segmentation analysis.

A niche marketing strategy is one of many ways in which buyer groups can be viewed for this analysis. The purpose of segmentation analysis is to evaluate the attractiveness of the various market segments that the business may want to serve.

If the segment or niche is assessed and found to be attractive, then the business should go after it. However, if the segment or niche is not, it should be abandoned. Once segmentation is completed and a target market selected, a positioning is chosen. The business can then finalize the marketing mix (price, product/service, place, promotion) to be used to deliver its tar-

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geted message to the desired market.

A translator with a scientific background may go through this type of exercise and decide to focus on the niche of patent translation because the market segment is lucrative. An interpreter with a similar background may decide on a niche strategy of working only in medical

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settings for the same reasons.

As the examples indicate, translators and interpreters can be very

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clear and focused about their services when they have a niche. Clarity and focus are desirable since they allow businesses to understand and work on delivering what they do best. However, with a lucrative niche, translators and interpreters may be vulnerable to competition.

Despite the potential for competition, I think that the admonishment to find a niche is well intended and good advice. The meaning behind the phrase indicates that we are being asked to put some rigor into

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the decisions that we make about the services that we want to offer. In part, this means testing our assumptions about those services, and then making sound business decisions based on our findings.

For translators and interpreters, finding the time to do the work of market research for better decision-making probably adds to the tensions between work and business needs. However, the extra work will provide valuable insight and help to increase the professionalism with which translation and interpreting services are delivered, making it, in my opinion, well worth the time.

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Memuna Williams is an entrepreneur and French>English translator with 16 years experience working in the translation industry. She is the founder of Avantgarde Translations. Memuna holds an M.A. in translation from Université de Montréal and a B.A. in translation from Concordia University. She is currently an EMBA candidate at the McColl Graduate School of Business. She lives in Charlotte, and is married with three children. Contact:

memuna@avantgardetranslations.com

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G. David Heath, at:

infoexact@mindspring.com

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