

The technical tick list

In the first column in a regular series by ITI's corporate members, Sue Clark reveals what her company, MTT, looks for in a technical translator



Sue Clark is managing director of MTT. She joined the company in 1991, coming from a background of automation and engineering, was made director in 1993 and bought the company in 2004. She has a passion for big motorbikes and also enjoys race cars, climbing and kayaking.

With more than 30 years of experience, the Kidderminster-based team at Midland Technical Translations (MTT) has developed a high level of expertise in the niche markets of technical, marketing and legal translations. Working with clients across a range of countries, MTT regularly handles projects in more than 50 languages for clients ranging from blue-chip giants to small, local companies beginning to make a name for themselves in the export market.

Our key clients need a particular type of translator to successfully carry out their projects. We handle a wide range of documents, from press releases and brochures to apps and websites. However, each project will require a mix of highly specialised technical terminology balanced against a marketing message that must be accurately conveyed. Texts are aimed at engineers, specialist buyers or technicians, so we're careful to match our style and terminology to the reader's expectations.

Our preferred translators for this kind of specialist work are linguists who have several years of experience across a number of technical fields. An article about a drive or motor, for example, may talk about how it has been used in applications across various industries from water processing to paper making, so wide-ranging technical experience is usually a prerequisite for us.

Developing relationships

We also need translators who are prepared to work with the client, talking to them directly if needed, to help establish what their preferred terminology or style might be. We

keep glossaries and reference materials to assist with this process, but ultimately the linguists themselves have to get inside the world of the client and use any feedback to represent their message to best advantage. It also helps for our clients to get to know our translators, so they feel they know who is doing the work – it's not a faceless transaction.

Some of our best translators have been engineers working in the relevant field before they came to translation as a second career. Although rare, this hands-on experience is greatly valued by our clients, especially when a translator can point out errors in the original text. Sometimes, translators are asked to research particular aspects of a market, so a willingness to be flexible comes in handy. Needless to say, it's not for everyone, but for those who are keen to work with us, it can be very rewarding.

Local businesses

We work closely with teams from UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) in the area, helping local businesses take their first steps towards exporting. In these instances, it's a real opportunity to get in at the start of any language requirements, determining how translation and localisation needs will be best met and bringing together a great team of linguists to support the client towards their goal. This might mean supplying interpreters to assist with market visits, translating business cards and brochures that they will take with them or setting up phone calls to make initial arrangements. We'll also support them with contract translations, and of course product literature. Having a skilled team of linguists to draw on is vital for the

success of these companies and it's vital for them to know that their particular technical and marketing messages will be translated in the most advantageous way possible.

The instructions provided for each project are always clear, so the translator understands exactly what's needed right from the start. Access to client contacts is arranged if required, and in-house subject specialists are always available to assist with any questions. Assistance with document formatting is provided and we always try to ensure the final document is provided for translation to avoid any late changes. Our linguists are our most valuable resource and we try

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hard to support them in positive, practical ways.

Finding a logical, methodical, technical-minded translator with a gift for the occasional marketing-type headline is tricky. The creative flair needed to sell the product does not often combine with the technical expertise to describe in detail how it works. Technical terminology can be researched and documented, but we also need people who can create an inspiring piece of text on a dry, technical subject. 

MTT specialises in technical, marketing and legal texts. More than 50 per cent of its projects are purely technical, and an additional 40 per cent are in technical marketing. Linguists wishing to work with MTT can download an application form from www.midlandtechnical.co.uk.