

How shifting your perspective can improve business

Keith Banfield talks to **Corinne Blésius** about how to give your business a boost by networking, direct mail, plus tips on the best way to market yourself



Corinne Blésius MITI, is a French translator who has worked full-time since 1985 and been freelance since 1988. She specialises in finance, law and management and is based in Taverham, near Norwich.

At the end of last year, I was invited to a Marketing Conference organised jointly by the Chamber of Commerce of Milton Keynes and North Bucks, BRE (Business Referral Exchange) and Business Link. The event was designed for companies and business people generally. As the only translator there, I did feel apprehensive and slightly out of place, but by the end of the evening I felt inspired, energised and ready to put my 'work smarter not harder' plan into action.

The event turned out to be a positive experience, essentially because the one thing that everybody had in common was that we were all professionals wanting to improve our businesses and ourselves. The fact that people did not know much about translation and what a translator does gave me a great opportunity to network in a different way and to explain what I could do for potential clients. The event significantly shifted my perspective on how I market myself.

One of the speakers at the conference was Keith Banfield, Managing Director of training company PLUS and a judge at the National Sales Awards. He is a founder member of the Professional Speakers Association and often appears in the press, writing for leading magazines and broadcasting on radio. I was impressed and inspired by the practical content of the material he presented and his motivational approach. Here he shares some of his expertise on how to market yourself.

You have looked at several ways to make business cards work harder. What did you discover and how could we make ours get better results too?

The first thing is to think about why you are giving out the business card in the first place. Some people have business cards printed with basic details (name, address, phone number, maybe their title), but they stop short of thinking 'what does the customer actually want from them?' The most important thing is for the card to state what you can do for someone else. For instance if someone is selling security equipment to keep a company secure, I'd suggest they put something like 'We help companies to make their premises more secure with our security gates etc'.

We all collect and store business cards over the years, and if they don't tell us clearly what we are going to get from phoning that number then we're not going to make that call.

Cards can also look fairly nondescript, so if yours can create some impact it will be all the more powerful. One way to create an impact and to make yourself more memorable is to include a photograph like they do in America and Australia. I think this is important because many people are visually minded and they recognise faces more readily than names. If they see your face then they will be more likely to call as they'll remember you.

You can also make cards more

memorable by being different and creative. For example, I played with my title and instead of putting Director/Managing Director, which is what everyone tends to do, I tried out other names. One was decision-maker. People would notice and say 'decision-maker. I like that!' And they'd remember it.

My latest business card is a triple-folded piece of card with pictures on it and 'How I can help you'. It's like a 60-second brochure. People are busy and don't have time to read through brochures but this business card gives them all the essential information quickly. I have had a great response using this style of card.

How could we make the most of networking occasions and events?

Think about who is likely to be at the networking meetings. Are these people likely to be potential customers or are they all small businesses who are never going to buy from you? That is not necessarily a reason to rule them out because they might know other people that they can introduce you to. But if you are going to a networking meeting, think about why you are going and what you want to achieve from it. Work out a strategy before you go.

Most importantly, talk to people you don't know. At networking meetings you'll often see people scanning the room looking for someone they know to talk to so that they don't have to step outside of their comfort zone.

But I think it is crucial that you plan to meet new people. Make it easier by preparing a one-line opener, something you can say so that you feel comfortable approaching

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strangers. One that I use a lot is to be interested in people. If I am asked what I do, I say, 'I help people to... I help people to make more appointments by telephone. I help people to market their company more successfully', etc. Think about what you can do to help someone else. Think about what you can give, and if you can give, it will come back to you. So 'I help people to...' is a great way to introduce yourself.

You can also volunteer to be a speaker. If you can speak at these events you are more likely to be known by everyone there than if you are just mingling and mixing with a few people. Get used to speaking for 20 minutes or 30 minutes and spend time preparing a speech which is interesting and entertaining.

How can you get even more from one of these events?

Another tactic is to look out for exhibitions that are coming up. Check out the website www.exhibitions.co.uk, which lists UK exhibitions, who is organising the events and their contact numbers. Then put yourself forward as a speaker. You will perhaps be talking to 100 people at a time, which is a great opportunity to spread your net and network.

How can you ensure or at least significantly increase your chances of the audience buying from you?

I think if you are going to speak you need to capture people's details. One way of doing this is to put a feedback form on everyone's seats. Ask people what they thought of your talk and at the same time get their details. Ask for their permission to keep in touch, perhaps by email. It's important to ask permission for this if you intend to contact them by email because new legislation means it is illegal to send unsolicited emails.

At the bottom of the feedback form you can put something like 'How can I help you further?' And list two or three things you could do to this end. Maybe they have events they are organising you could speak at. And you can actually ask on the feedback form whether it is okay to contact them about such things. If

you don't want to use the feedback form, another way to capture people's details is to write notes on your talk and offer people a copy if they email you. This allows you to get back to them via email with the notes, but you will also have captured all their details.

Is there a way in which this same idea could benefit larger companies too?

The best idea for larger companies is to use the exhibition route. If they are going to speak at an exhibition, they need to talk to the organisers early on to make sure that they can fit you into the programme.

The great thing about exhibitions is that not only will you have about 100 people assembled for you, they will all be in your industry and will be the type of people you are trying to contact. Also you will be included in the advance publicity for the exhibition so your name will be up on websites, in exhibition magazines, on all of the material being used to promote the event.

You don't like paying for advertising and have found an alternative way of appearing in the media for free. What's the best way of going about this?

To get free publicity you need to realise that publications, whether they are newspapers or magazines, are always looking for stories.

The key is to supply them with interesting news and photographs. People will often take the easiest and cost-effective route, so if you can provide a story that is topical and of interest to their readers for free or for a small charge they will often take you up on the offer.

Some people write their own articles, but they might not be very good at it, so it might be worth paying a copywriter or someone who knows how to write news stories. That way your copy should fit the bill and be presented in the right format for a particular newspaper or magazine.

The same applies with radio and TV. They are also looking for stories and interviews, so don't be shy about contacting them either. Get used to finding out what events are

coming up and what topics or stories they are going to be covering. If you don't want to do it yourself, employ a PR company. Getting this sort of free media publicity is something that a lot of people overlook.

You are an exponent of creating win/win opportunities. How could ITI readers use that in their businesses?

If you can find a company or a third party that has a problem which you can solve by doing something together, it creates a 'win/win' opportunity. Here's a good example. I contacted a conference centre whose conference room was predominantly empty. People did not know they existed. And they had fantastic rooms and facilities that so many businesses would use if only they knew they were there. They were publicising the rooms by showing three or four people around every week.

My idea was to show the conference rooms to a whole year's worth of people in one go. To do that we got speakers together, as a professional speaker myself, I was one of them. I also knew other speakers who I could involve in the project. We spoke for free but we were in front of a big audience of about 200 people who paid nothing to attend. In turn we could sell products to the people who attended. So the audience won, the conference centre won, and we won. And if you can find that, it means everyone does business.

Another time, I was contacted by a company which asked me if I wanted to advertise in their magazine. I had three spaces left on one of my sales training courses, so I said I'd swap the three places for free advertising. They agreed, came along on the training course and thoroughly enjoyed it, so much so that in the following four months they doubled their turnover.

The win/win was great because I essentially got free advertising because I had the free places on the course and they had training and doubled their turnover as a result of coming onto the course.

But also when they happened to be speaking to someone else who was looking to run a series of courses they put my name forward, and I am now running courses for that third party as well, which I would never have heard of had it not been for them

'Put yourself forward as a speaker. You could be talking to 100 people. A great opportunity to spread your net and network'

introducing me – another example of a win/win situation.

I know that you've spent loads of money on unsuccessful direct mail in the past. You are now getting up to 20 per cent response. How is such a high figure possible?

I have spent a lot of money on direct mail and it has been wasted because I did the wrong thing. The most important aspect of direct mail is to get the right list. In the past, I have bought lists because they were cheap or free, or I have taken names out of directories, which were out of date.

You can get lists from list brokers and if you don't get what you need the alternative is to build your own list. Every time you talk to someone, add their details to your database. Ask for permission to keep in touch with them. You can even put together a newsletter to send out to these contacts. But make sure the newsletter is conversational and exciting, and include tips and ideas tailored to them.

Too many people who write newsletters to their existing customers put too many 'I', 'We', 'Our' in it. Who wants to read that? People are interested in what you can do for them. They are interested in your ideas and tips, so as well as keeping in touch make it interesting for them.

The second stage of any direct mail campaign is to get the right headline. Too many advertisements simply have the company name as their lead. But you need something that's going to grab people's attention and make them curious to read the rest.

Here are a couple of ideas. There is the 'How to' headline. 'How to double your sales in the next 10 weeks'. It creates curiosity and offers the carrot of benefits. Another way is to put a number: '67 ways to boost your profits in the next year'. People will think 'I can only think of four or five and so I am going to get 62 new ways by reading on'. But the best way to come up with the strongest message is to brainstorm with colleagues and friends.

First write a list of headlines, then talk to people who are likely to be your customers and ask them which appeals to them most and why. Then test out two headlines with people on your list. Send one headline out to



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half of the mailing list and another to the other half and you'll find out which appealed the most. But be careful not to change anything else in the mailout, otherwise you won't know if it was the headline or the price or another factor that was the deciding factor.

It's also important to have a call for action, something to tell people what they need to do in order to get what you are offering in your mailing piece. Something like 'Call me now' or a form they need to fill in and send. Whatever you choose, make it clear and easy to do.

And the last but most important thing is to have an irresistible offer. Too often when we receive a mailing piece we think 'that sounds interesting, but I will deal with it later'. We put it at the bottom of the pile. It doesn't get dealt with for a few days, by which time the offer has expired. The irresistible offer will normally take the form of a 'PS' at the end of the letter; something like if you reply within seven days you will get a free copy of my latest audio programme. It would be something that people want but they would need to take action in order to get it. An irresistible offer could be something like an e-book, '25 ways to ensure you find the best translator', or an audiotape/CD or giving away some time. 'Reply within seven days and get 100 words translated free'.

And lastly, rather than sending out

20,000 mailing pieces just to find out no one actually wanted them, send out 50, then follow up by telephoning every single one. Find out did they open it? Did they read it? Would they be interested in your services? If not, why not? What would they expect to see in the mailing piece that would make them want to work with you? And when you know that type of information, then you can tweak the next one so that they become more effective and you get better results.

What you have told us already will be a big help to anyone thinking about direct mail, but you have an even better idea called packaged information haven't you?

Packaged information is a great way to get people to respond to an advertisement. Let's suppose, to demonstrate what packaged information can do for you, that I am an estate agent. I am selling property and I am putting my advertisement into a newspaper alongside other estate agents. If I just do that I am not going to stand out. Instead of offering the lowest fee or saying that we have branches all over the county/country, I would put together a report on say '56 ways to sell your house more quickly'. It only needs to be a few pages of A4 but it should be nicely put together. My advertisement would read 'Free report: 'the 56 ways to sell your house more quickly'.

Now I know that only people who ask me for that report are in the market to sell their house. Otherwise why would they want it? And the fact that I have given them the free report and I have had an opportunity to promote our company within that report means that they are more likely to choose me. More importantly, I now know who is in the market. And having given them the free report it would be easy to go back to them and say, 'What did you think of that information? Can we help you sell your house?'

The other good thing about packaged information is that your potential customer is only asking for a free report. By taking this approach your response to the advert will be much higher because someone isn't committed to taking up your services. And you can apply that to absolutely anything. If you are selling office furniture, 'The 22 pitfalls you need to avoid when buying office furniture'. Whatever it is, you know that the

'Perhaps there are companies that do things that bolt onto your services and they may already have a list of potential customers'

people asking for that report are in the market for office furniture.

Questions aimed at the translation industry:

What marketing strategies could translators use, taking into account that we rarely meet clients face to face?

One method you could use as a marketing strategy is to build an email list and keep in touch with people on it. One way of building this list is to put a free booklet or a free report or something your clients would want on your website. For example, I have on my website 'The 67 secrets of success', which is a free downloadable e-book and it's been put together as a PDF file so anyone can open and read it, whatever computer they have. All they have to give me is their name, email address and permission to keep in touch. And that's growing into a bigger and bigger email list every day, just by giving that free information. But don't only use this list for selling, think of giving. If you keep giving to that email list, eventually people will come back and buy something from you.

How would you adapt marketing strategies depending on whether you are a translator or an interpreter?

I think that marketing strategies are very similar across the board, whatever the marketplace. The win/win idea for example works very well for anyone. It is just a question of finding who to win/win with. It is finding who is likely to need your services, or what other company could you contact that is already talking to your customers but is not a competitor of yours. Perhaps there are companies that do things that bolt onto your services and they may have already got a list of potential customers. One strategy you could use, particularly as a translator or interpreter, is to think about who else is going to your marketplace that you could do a win/win with. Where you could share and help each other.

What marketing material would you recommend for translators and interpreters to send to potential or existing clients?

I don't like sending things per se. I

mean, you can do mailing pieces but I like to talk to people on the phone. I like to use the email and I like to very finely hone what I am doing. It is very easy to have lots of information and glossy brochures printed, but often they end up in the bin.

Think about who your market is. What is the message you are trying to get across? Do you need to send something through the post to do that? Could it be done by email? Could it be done by a telephone call? And if you are going to send something, whatever it is you are going to send, make sure it is of good quality. If you are going to produce business cards, avoid the card printed on the inkjet printer and cut by hand with scissors. It is all about image. If I am booking you as a translator or an interpreter, I need you to show me that you are demonstrating quality because I can't have mistakes.

In what way do you believe marketing material differs for existing clients to increase revenue and potential clients to attract revenue?

If you have existing clients there are three things to consider. One is the number of customers you already have. The second is the average order value that they give you. And the third is the number of times they come back for repeat business. If you can increase all of those three ways, then you have a compounding effect on the increase.

One way to help existing clients is to keep in touch with them on a regular basis and when you do, don't keep trying to tell them what you have done, tell them what you can do for them, give them something, and before long you will be top of their list. Their mind is like an internet search engine. And you need to be right at the top.

In terms of attracting new clients, I think you are going to be judged on the first impression you create. If you are going to attract new clients be the best. Make sure all your material is of the highest quality. It costs little more to have something printed brilliantly than to have it printed very badly. Don't do things on your inkjet

printer as a first means of contact. Get beautifully printed cards that look good quality. And be different. You need to have something that makes you stand out. What's your unique selling point? Your unique selling proposition? Why should I come and buy from you? **How can translators and interpreters who normally work independently target large organisations? How do you go about cold calling?**

Get a list of all the people you are trying to contact depending on your area of specialisation. Then make two telephone calls: the first to find out who you need to speak to – but do not attempt to talk to them to start with, perhaps go to a different department to do your fact-finding. Find out why they might use translators, if they use translators, when they use them, who do they use at the moment, when will they be selecting some others, where do they go to select them, what is their budget? Don't ask these questions of the decision-maker that you are trying ultimately to contact. On the second day, phone and ask for the decision-maker by name.

If you use christian names, people are more likely to put you through because they will get the impression that you have already spoken to them before. One of the common mistakes people make when doing cold calling is first of all they do not believe in themselves and they think of themselves as the 'little person'. And they feel insecure about making that cold call because they fear they are going to be rejected. And of course the person at the other end of the phone picks up on that up.

Be confident in your abilities when you make the phone call. It's important to talk about what you can do for them in a positive way. Rather than 'I am in the area next week. I wonder if I could pop in and see you about translation services'? It is very humble, very 'I am really not worthy of your time and I have got nothing to offer you' type of language. Be assertive. What can you do for them? Why are you phoning them? It is a win/win again. And think in terms of that win/win. It is not just you getting some work. It is how you are going to help them.

How do marketing strategies differ from sector to sector – from say financial to legal to technical? Again, I think that marketing is very

similar across the board. Who are you targeting? What is in it for them? Why should they work with you? And with marketing it is about testing, trying something. Test to see if it works or doesn't, and if it does not, why doesn't it work? That information is absolutely critical. The biggest mistake most people make is they blow all their budget on one campaign, one idea, without testing to see if it is working. And once the money has gone they have nothing for an alternative push. They then think that marketing doesn't work, so go back to networking because that's nice and safe.

Considering the type of business required by translators and interpreters, what are the golden rules for websites?

Make your website easy to navigate and easy to read. Make sure you don't just run text saying, 'I can do this and that'. Tell them what they are going to get from you and what makes you different. It's also a good idea to have audio clips on your website – a good idea for interpreters especially. This is easy to do,

especially if you have broadband. Translators could have examples of texts that they have translated.

Get the best website you can. Many people take the DIY option and these websites can look amateurish. Get your branding right so it follows through in all your printed material and your website. Also it's essential to get yourself into the search engines. A professional web designer can help you maximise your searchability.

A lot of the search engines do something called a 'cost by click'. This is where you are paying per click if someone comes onto your website. But the search engine puts you right at the top of the listing and you have a little box, and if someone clicks on that box, then you pay an agreed amount of money. If they don't, you don't pay anything. You can take that box down whenever you want to.

Following on from that, any recommendation for email?

Keep your emails brief and make sure you have permission to keep in touch with people. Give them things that they want to see. Don't keep

blowing your own trumpet. People want emails which are giving them ideas and information. And don't go crazy with emails.

I get people who email virtually every day and it just overwhelms you. Send something every few weeks or every month and you won't become a pest. Also, never just send unsolicited emails out in their thousands as this approach will just backfire. □

ONE-DAY WORKSHOP

ITI has negotiated a special rate for a one-day sales and marketing course run by Keith Banfield for translators and interpreters. It will be held at the ITI offices in Milton Keynes on Monday, 19 April.

The course costs £147+vat per person, a saving of £200 on the normal price. This includes lunch, refreshments and detailed course reference notes.

You can pay by cheque made payable to PLUS for £172.73 (£147+VAT). Post this with all your details to PLUS, 6 Bowling Leys, Middleton, Milton Keynes. MK10 9BD, or call on 01908 251120 and have your credit card details to hand. Alternatively, you may prefer to email action@plusresults.com.

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- The evening is arranged by ITI on behalf of all translator and interpreter colleagues – we look forward to welcoming ITI members as well as members of the IoL, TA and students currently attending translation or interpreting courses.
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