

Making it work

Currently studying part-time for a Master's while also running a freelance translation business, Megan Onions shares her tips and tricks for balancing work and academic commitments



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When I first decided (more necessity than choice, in truth) that I was going to pursue my Master's degree in translation alongside running my freelance business, I wondered how I would keep all of the plates spinning. It can be done, and this is an overview of how I do it*.

Choose the right course Make sure that you will gain knowledge and skills that will further your standing or complement your existing experience. If you are going to sacrifice your time and other activities, it should be worth it!

Talk to your lecturers I am in a fortunate position, as I went back to the university where I did my undergraduate degree. I have a great relationship with my lecturers and always know that I can pop in and ask their advice. It was one such informal meeting with my course coordinator that spurred me on to strike out on my own earlier this year. This also makes your lecturers aware of your work commitments and helps everything to run smoothly. The rest, of course, is up to you.

Stick to your schedule There are only 24 hours in a day, no matter how much you have to do. It takes a lot of planning to get your assignments, reading and paid work done, but it is possible. The times for my next set of lectures have not been confirmed yet, but last year I had lectures on a Tuesday morning and afternoon. This meant that,

although I had some free time in between my classes, Tuesdays were a no-go in my diary. Don't bite off more than you can chew – you'll get indigestion.

Do non-work activities It may not seem possible, but there is time to have fun! If you plan, work hard and respect your limits, you will keep your head above water and still have some time for yourself. I like to spend this time away from the computer, so I cook and go out to restaurants with my other half, or we go for walks along the beach.

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I also try and get active by swimming or going to the gym, but this doesn't always get done... The main thing is to get away from your desk and recharge your batteries.

Build your online presence It's vital that people can find you online. Your website and other online profiles allow potential clients to see your qualifications, experience and, most importantly, contact details, and social media are a great method of developing a network of fellow translators and linguists. I have profiles on the following sites: about.me, Facebook, LinkedIn, ProZ, Twitter, Viadeo and Xing, alongside my website. However, this doesn't mean that you should



Taking time away from your desk – whether at the gym, at a restaurant or simply going for a walk – is important

spread yourself too thinly. If you only have time to update two or three profiles, only create two or three. Half-filled or neglected profiles are no help to you or your audience.

Optimise your profiles There are numerous ways to make the most of your online identity and give your contacts more information about you. For example, LinkedIn allows you to add applications to your profile, such as a blog plug-in to publish posts on LinkedIn, ways to add your portfolio and events calendar to your profile, and even an application to display your reading list. On ProZ, you can add your own logo and CV, integrate your Twitter feed and adapt the colours using html (mine is always my favourite mint green). Having a memorable profile gets you noticed, so get customising!

Consider blogging The case for and against blogging has been argued time and again, but I think there are significant advantages. Personally, I find blogging to be a great way to connect with other industry professionals. I am currently in the process of posting a series of short interviews with colleagues¹, which has taught me more about blogging and provided valuable insights into others' careers. Another collaborative project was my Freelance Translator's Reading List², collating recommendations from fellow tweeting translators. Get your thinking cap on and see what you can come up with. Why not write about your experiences of studying alongside

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your translation work? I, for one, would be interested to read it.

Finding work

So now you have your mindset and availability sorted, how do you go about getting work?

Work pro bono If you are more interested in maintaining your translation skills than earning your crust while studying (lucky you!), voluntary work is always a worthwhile option. When I was starting out, I translated medical trial papers for the Cochrane Pregnancy and Childbirth Group. Translators Without Borders is one of the more well-known organisations to approach, but why not look at other, smaller charities who would undoubtedly gain a lot from your help?


Diversify The vast majority of translators provide other, complementary services. What are your strong points? I love editing and proofreading other people's work. Some people hate it, and I understand that, but I really enjoy it, so I offer it. I also offer writing and blogging because they are hobbies as well as skills. Why not earn money for something you enjoy? Other linguists offer transcription, voice-

RESOURCES

About.me: <https://about.me>
Facebook: www.facebook.com
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com
ProZ: www.proz.com
Twitter: <https://twitter.com>
Viadeo: www.viadeo.com
Xing: <https://www.xing.com>
Cochrane Pregnancy and Childbirth Group: <http://pregnancy.cochrane.org>
Translators Without Borders: <http://translatorswithoutborders.org>

over and subtitling, while other skills such as desktop publishing can be very desirable to clients. Assess your strengths and consider other services that you could provide. Make sure though, that you only offer what you feel comfortable delivering to a professional standard.

Use your academic links Think about how you can market your services within your university environment. I have been offering proofreading services to students for a while, and I have found it to be a very beneficial arrangement for both parties. You could also offer tutoring for foreign students or note-taking for disabled students, although these are not avenues that I have explored. What I have been doing for some time though is holding informal CV workshops with fellow students. I have a knack for writing up skills and experience and making them look their best. Why not profit from such a skill? This may eventually turn into mentoring and consulting, but that's a consideration for the future. You can't be everything to everyone all at the same time.

So there we have it. A summary of how I built (and still am building) my business and supplement the income from my translation work with complementary services. I hope that you have enjoyed this article and that my ideas have provided some food for thought. 

** Disclaimer: I don't always succeed!*

FOOTNOTES

¹ **Linguist, 3 Questions** (<http://speechmarktranslation.com/category/1-linguist-3-questions/>)

² <http://speechmarktranslation.com/freelance-translation-books/>