

Dealing with freelance famine

Clients gone on holiday? Megan Onions shows you how to make the most of a quiet period



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One of the most popular posts to date on my blog was about my experience of going through a quiet period and how I used the time to my advantage. In this article, I will summarise the main points of my post and add a few thoughts that have developed since.

The freelance life can sometimes be an emotional rollercoaster and, particularly at the start of the journey, it can seem that there are more troughs than peaks. My aim in writing this article is to reassure those of us experiencing a lean period that there is light at the end of the tunnel. The key is taking this quieter time to work on your business or, if needed, your own well-being.

Periods of little or no work can be unsettling, but it's important to trust in your skills and professionalism. Your clients will contact you. Soon. Use this time to take a look at your business plan, do some marketing, and work on your subject knowledge, skills and professional profile.

Specialist linguists have an advantage when dealing with famine periods. In the financial sector, for example, there are distinct busy times of year. Experienced specialists, who are familiar with these patterns, are able to anticipate the barren spells and use them to market to new clients, catch up on CPD or book a holiday.

Boost your confidence

It's always a good idea to revisit your website regularly, whether you update the copy, refresh the design or add

some images. The mini photography studio at the ITI Conference was a great opportunity for colleagues to get professional photographs taken, and I have seen some of the brilliant results on Twitter lately! If you have not yet done so, I would recommend booking a short session with a local professional photographer. My photo shoot took place in early April and I was delighted with the results. Taking the morning off to invest in a professional image is really worth doing. Similarly, other aspects of your


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online presence should not be overlooked. Schedule half an hour every month or so to update your LinkedIn page, for example. Updating and adding information regularly means a better ranking on Google, as search engines love dynamic content.

We all have go-to guides when we're having a wobble confidence-wise, and my personal choices are the following books written by fellow linguists: *How to Succeed as a Freelance Translator* by Corinne McKay and *The Entrepreneurial Linguist* by Judy and Dagmar Jenner. In addition, I recently purchased *The Prosperous Translator* from Chris Durban at the ITI Conference, and what I have read so far is straight-

talking and sometimes funny advice from people who have seen it, done it and got the translation T-shirt. All of these books are well worth a read for both newcomers to translation and seasoned pros – there's something for everyone (buy them at www.lulu.com). If you feel that your business could do with a boost (who doesn't?), take the time to absorb some words of wisdom and implement them.

One of the comments on my blog post rightly pointed out that, unless you decide to take an 'unplugged' break (no computer, no work phone calls), there is no such thing as a quiet time for freelance translators and interpreters. There is always something that we can work on to further our businesses, whether that is developing our source language skills, doing our expenses or taking an online course in a specialist field.

Back in February the wordface was looking a little lonely, but I worked hard, put a lot of these suggestions into action and acquired two new clients within a few weeks. Since then, I have worked on regular collaborative projects with fellow translators, received client referrals and expanded my range of services to include copywriting, which was one of my long-term goals. The time and effort I put into my short famine period has really paid off. What benefits could you see from working on your business for just a few weeks? 

The famine checklist

- Update your website and/or online profiles.
- Start a course/learn new skills – could you widen your range of services?
- Do some CPD – try to strike a balance between language skills, subject knowledge and business skills.
- Catch up with admin – if you're the type of person who lets their bookkeeping stack up, now is the time to get your office back in order.
- Check in with existing clients – do you have any new skills or qualifications you could let them know about?
- Take a break! When the work comes flooding in again, you'll be glad you did.