

FREE REPORT

11 LANGUAGE SERVICE AGENCY SCAMS & HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Revealed – the most common ways a Rogue Language Agency can fool both event clients and interpreters to make huge profits for itself at their expense



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11 Language service agency scams - how to protect yourself

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Introduction – the problem and what happens

In the world today there are at least 140,200 intermediary language agencies world-wide (Source: The 2019 Nimdzi 100).

And how many properly qualified interpreters are there in the world?

According to the United Nations (as quoted by AIIC) approximately 1 person in every 6 million people world-wide works as a professional freelance interpreter.

With 7.8 Billion people on the globe that makes at most a couple of thousand interpreters, actively chased after by a vastly higher number of intermediaries.

The reason for this is that interpreting is the ultimate language skill: there is no time to look up in dictionaries, online or otherwise, and either the interpreter masters the language (including technical terms for an event) and is able to deliver the equivalent content in another language, or the content will fail to be passed on adequately – if at all!

Accordingly it has become standard practise for interpreters NEVER to hand out their business cards, and to refer event enquiries to the language agency that hired them.

So what happens when an event is due is that, following normal sourcing procedures, event organisers typically contact several agencies to get a quotation for the event pricing.

Often this happens after basic decisions that impact the nature of the event have been made: e.g. venue, catering, accommodation, timetable and sub-group session breakdowns.

Those agencies then contact the same local interpreters (because the number in any given market is relatively small) and they all quote the same figures to the agencies, since their rates do not vary according to who the client is.

Normally the agency with the least mark- up wins the contract BUT with the cut-throat competition of the past years, some agencies have started to cheat to get an unfair advantage.

This report sets out the most common scams, the harm that they do, who their victims are, and most importantly, what YOU can do to protect yourself and your event from the fallout of these activities of these rogue agencies.

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In most cases, there is no legal recourse possible against the perpetrators, because what they do does not actually constitute a crime in most countries, so seeking and obtaining redress is very difficult after the event.

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Scam no 1 – Identity Theft by Agency

This scam originated in South-East Asia for European language interpreters, who were exceptionally rare in the local market, and who charged a rate that was accordingly higher than for local languages (such as Thai / Mandarin) but less than the premium Asian languages (Japanese / Korean).

How it works is as follows:

1 All locally based interpreters able to work in the relevant languages are contacted and their CVs are collected (providing this is standard practise for interpreters, as this document summarises their depth of experience at similar events).

2 Foreign students with no linguistic training (most often those travelling as part of a gap year from their unrelated studies) are hired, often on a part-time basis, to ensure that they do not qualify even for the minimum wage requirements under local laws.

3 When the event takes place, the local interpreters are not informed that the agency has won the contract (by under-bidding the more honest competition) and are never informed by the rogue agency that the event is even taking place.

4 Instead, the foreign students are placed by the agency in the interpreting booths and told to interpret the content of the event into their native tongue. In some (and far from all) cases they are shown how to use the interpreting equipment (microphones, language channels, colleague handover switches, cough mute buttons, and reverse language pair buttons – aka relay, etc.) but in many cases they are left untrained.

5 Should the event organiser query why there are clearly young females in say, the French booth instead of two older men, they will say something like, the older men were sick or otherwise unavailable, and so had to be replaced last minute by the females. This also serves to deflect some criticism of the whole scam.

6 In fact, often no local interpreters are even aware that Rogue Agency Co is even bidding, and certainly that they were bidding based on their CVs and standard market rates. They lost a potential job, and wonder why, but Rogue Agency Co will invoice the full quoted figure.

7 The profits for the rogue agency can be very high: in the cases that have come to light the rogue agency was paying its foreign students **per month** less than a proper interpreter charges **per day**!

The rewards of the scam

Clearly the more such staff are used in an event, the more the rogue agency stands to earn.

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In certain cases, major international political events have gone to such rogue agencies, who have supplied up to seven booths of “interpreter” students for a whole week, at two students per booth.

The pure profit derived from this kind of illicit practise can be very tempting: interpreters in South East Asia can charge up to 900 USD per day each.

At two interpreters per booth that makes a daily total charged to the event client of say $900 \times 7 \times 2 = 9800$ USD per day = 68,600 USD for the week.

Compared with the costs of 900 per month for the students = $30 \text{ USD per day} \times 7 \times 2 = 420$ USD per day = 2940 USD for the week.

This means that using this scam, Rogue Agency Co can make profit of up to 65,660 USD per week! That is pure profit in excess of 3.4 Million USD per year!

Why this works

The scam relies on the fact that in international conferences, often organisation is left to local colleagues in the location decided upon for the conference, most often by a national professional body accepting to bear the cost of event organisation.

The people in such bodies are typically there because they are technically excellent in their field: not because they possess linguistic skills.

This means they often have no way of telling if the interpreting is being done well, unless they speak to their opposite numbers who speak foreign languages (assuming of course they can find someone able to communicate with them well enough to raise issues with them).

Often in such cases, there are only a small number of such colleagues able to complain about the quality of the interpreting, and often they do not wish to do so for fear of causing loss of face to the hosts, and so remain silent.

But even if they do complain to the event organisers, event organisers typically will complain about the output of one or two language booths (say Spanish and French), in which case Rogue Agency will explain the last minute nature of the handover to the students and maybe offer a reduced fee to the annoyed client to appease them...and hope nobody is any the wiser.

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It also relies upon the fact that international events that require interpreters rarely recur in the same geographic location for a number of years. This means there is no hope of repeat business, and thus no incentive to treat end clients well and honestly.

Under these circumstances the rewards are very great...but end clients are not fools, and in the end the practise becomes known.

At this point the Rogue Agency may well combine this scam with other ones, such as the Equipment Provider Referral Scam, having already incorporated the Direct Employment Scam in the process to relieve end clients of their money, without providing the service they paid for.

Event organisers who have repeat events however, though they are few, may themselves then implement the Interpreter Holiday Scam as a means of self-defence (see below). But in the long run this only serves to make matters even worse...

Victims

There are a number of victims to this scam: the most obvious class is attendees at an event where one of the Rogue Agencies is at work.

Sadly the technique has become known, and while ten years ago only one agency did this, now there are two or three agencies doing this in South-East Asia alone, and the first agency has expanded into other markets, such as China, India, the UK and the USA, and is now deploying the same scam there: basically nowadays nowhere is safe!

Besides the attendees, properly trained and qualified interpreters are also one of the main victims: they do not get work despite being competent and skilled, and may not even know about an event where they could have worked, and worked well to provide the service paid for, but not provided by the rogue agency. They lose their fees.

Then there are the honest language service agencies: they too may be victims, in that they may have provided honest bids for events, but have lost out to unfair competition from Rogue Agencies. This makes their own survival moot, and even encourages the temptation of joining the ranks of agencies that have gone rogue.

How to protect your event

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There are a few agencies run by interpreters themselves, and a certain number of interpreters also work as consultant interpreters, to help clients smooth out these kinds of issues, amongst others.

Using these kinds of services early on, at the event planning stage can help save a great deal of time and trouble.

Interpreters have tried to defend their interests by refusing to provide updated CVs to agencies at all, but this is counter-productive, because it leads to their being struck off lists of potential job candidates.

Clearly what they can do (and mostly have done) is to black-list the known Rogue Agencies, and refuse to have anything to do with them (refusing to provide even quotes) but this too can also be counter-productive whilst the scam is actively being pursued.

Instead, free tests can be organised with actual interpreters who have experience of working in similar fields, so that event organisers can verify that the people used know the topic, and can actually provide the service to the required level.

If they fail to turn up for some reason for the event, their contact details are provided so they can explain for themselves (typically in such circumstances they will recommend and provide contacts of suitable colleagues to replace them themselves).

The event timetable can be planned in such a way as to minimise interpreting costs (in terms of venues chosen for interpreting for sub-meetings, breakout groups and the like) and to ensure that the venue chosen is able to provide the facilities required, in addition to the necessary catering etc.

As a personal note, it is very gratifying to find foreign language speaking delegates who take to trouble to come to interpreter booths to thank us for our work, and for making the trouble involved in travelling, often thousands of miles from other continents, the success that made the effort worthwhile.

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Scam no 2 – Interpreter Holiday Scam

This scam also arose in the South East Asian market, as a result of the damage to the reputation of the events market caused by the Identity Theft Scam (see above).

This is quite simple and is based on the increasingly widely accepted perception in European Language markets that there are no competent interpreters based in South East Asia. (This is untrue: there are, but our identity has been stolen and our market presence suffers as a result).

It involves experienced interpreters, often staff interpreters at international agencies in certain fields, being hired at a reduced rate by event organisers (or even by some agencies) on the excuse that the travel from Europe can be used as a springboard for an exotic holiday in Asia.

They are paid at rates which might well be applicable in European centres of interpreter employment, but in reality, represent a discount from local interpreter rates of up to 50% according to local market.

Travel costs are not paid in full by the agencies for the incoming interpreters, but a (often small) contribution towards them is made by the Rogue Agency client.

The interpreters then work at the event, collect their fees and leave on tourist holidays (which in South East Asia can mean beach resorts available in the European winter).

The rewards of the scam

The Rogue Agency in fact provides the end client (the event organiser) with a relatively high quality service.

The interpreters are often happy to provide this kind of work, and accept the long haul travel involved.

The cost savings for the Rogue Agent are less than for the Identity Theft Scam, but can still be considerable. Charging rate is almost never reduced (except by a nominal amount to secure the contract award).

To use the same hypothetical event as before for the sake of comparability, at two interpreters per booth the daily total charged to the event client is as before, $900 \times 7 \times 2 = 9800$ USD per day = 68,600 USD for the week.

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Compared with the costs of 600 per day for the long-haul staff = 600 USD per day x 7 x 2 = 4200 USD per day = 29,400 USD for the week: less than before but still high.

This means that using this scam, Rogue Agency Co can still make profit of up to 39,200 USD per week! That is pure profit in excess of 2 Million USD per year!

This is just over half of the profitability of identity theft, but still a very considerable sum.

Why this works

In all fairness, it may well be that there are no local providers for certain language combinations: for example it would be very unusual to find interpreters who can work in Brazilian Portuguese in Asia, or say interpreters in Icelandic or Bokmal Norwegian, which certain specific events might possibly require.

Otherwise, this scam works because at least nominally, clients are being provided with properly qualified professionals to work at the event.

If they are able to rest, or somehow manage to arrive at destination well in advance of the event start date, it is perfectly possible that the imported interpreters may in fact do a perfectly acceptable job, and the client may have nothing to criticise in the performance of the agency.

However, that is unlikely.

The problem with quality from the client's perspective lies in that, because of timing constraints (notice before holidays to be provided to employers, time before the event at which the agency is awarded the job and similar considerations, including having completed the job before collecting payment), the interpreter's break is almost always organised to occur AFTER the event is held.

This means that interpreters can be working in the booth under conditions of jet-lag, especially between Europe and South East Asia, or worse, in cases in the Americas sourced from Asia.

This leads to exhaustion on the part of the interpreters, who thus do not provide optimal output quality, and often cannot, with the best will in the world, properly support any local colleagues in the booth. This is made worse in the case where all interpreters are hired in this way.

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Rogue agencies will often get away with this kind of arrangement by not re-using the same staff for more than one or two events, but by rotating their providers so no one knows them locally, and colleagues at the home base do not pick up on the fact that they are operating regularly elsewhere.

Victims

Once again, locally based interpreters in the event location's home market will suffer, because once again they are not consulted (or often even informed) about the event and live in blissful ignorance.

As outlined above, the end client (event organiser) may also be getting a raw deal and not obtaining the level of service quality that the fees charged warrant.

The locations where the events are held (that is the MICE industry in that location) will also suffer in the long run, from the reputational damage of not having local competent interpreters available (even though this may well be totally untrue).

The visiting interpreters, if they are discovered taking part in this kind of arrangement may also face disciplinary action from professional bodies (such as AIIC) who take a dim view of such dishonest practises, and may even strike off members, leading to loss of livelihood for the parties involved.

How to protect your event

There are relatively simple steps that can be taken by an end user (event organiser) to protect against this scam: since each interpreter's CV is provided the location of most past events should be stated, thus giving a clear idea of each person's home base.

If the event location is remote (such as in Borneo) then it would be normal not to find any local interpreters, but then the home bases of the proposed staff should be checked and be located in major city hubs located as close as possible to the event location.

Under such circumstances it would be perfectly normal accepted practise to repay the interpreters for the usual travel costs to the event location (rarely business and almost never first class) and to have a budget item for travel days if the time is in excess of 3 hours in addition to the usual fees.

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But in major cities in Asia, such travel costs rarely apply, unless the language combination is truly rare: people travelling from far away need to show good cause: this is the best way to avoid this kind of scam.

Obviously, as previously stated, there are a few agencies run by interpreters themselves, and a certain number of interpreters also work as consultant interpreters, to help clients smooth out these kinds of issues, amongst others.

Using their services will not just protect your event against this scam, but also present the same advantages if they are involved early as stated above.

For example, the event timetable can be planned to minimise interpreting costs (for sub-meetings, breakout groups and similar) and to ensure that the venue chosen is the best suitable, from every viewpoint.

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Scam no 3 – Late Payment Scam

The scarcity of qualified interpreters means that most of them are self-employed as freelancers: it is very difficult to find colleagues to employ, and to arrange for regular work for them so that this mode of working is the norm in the private market.

This does not apply to international institutions such as emanations of the United Nations or the European Union, and other bodies such as the International Court in The Hague: there interpreters are employed and work full-time but they are not present on the private conference market.

This meant historically that the practice arose, especially in locations that are not major city hubs for interpreters, for interpreters to be paid for their work, including their expenses, at the end of the event, in cash.

As agencies rose to prominence in the last few decades, the influence of their accountants and corporate practices in general has been felt, and now, in major city hubs, most interpreters have come to accept payment at 30 days.

Now the pressure is on freelancers to accept payment at 30 days at the end of the month, or at the end of the following month (a complicated way of hiding payment at 60 days), and sometimes even at 90 days.

However, it should always be realised that Agency arguments are 100% bogus! I would like to see ANY Agency (or Client) world-wide that gets away with paying for phones, electricity, internet, water etc, ANYWHERE. at 30, 60 or 90 days!

It is up to the interpreter to reject such unfair payment terms: they have no corporate structures or credit arrangements to enable them to accept such supplier finance being imposed upon them.

So some people may buckle under the pressure, to the detriment of all their colleagues resisting this unfair practise.

But things get worse...some rogue agencies will see this time to elicit fake criticism of work from the clients, as an excuse for refusal to pay interpreters at all, including their ancillary and travel costs.

The rewards of the scam

The rewards of the scam can be very high indeed: even higher than the identity theft scam!

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To use the same hypothetical event as before for the sake of comparability, at two interpreters per booth the daily total charged to the event client is as before, $900 \times 7 \times 2 = 9800$ USD per day = 68,600 USD for the week.

If nobody is paid at all that translates into 100% profit for the Rogue Agency: that is all of 68,600 USD for the week.

Typically however, the complaint is used to negotiate a drastic reduction of fees only: for example travel costs may be reimbursed only, or fees may be reduced to 20 or 30% of the full rate.

In either case the earnings would be much higher than the interpreter holiday scam: if we compare with costs of say a 30% fee of 270 USD per day $\times 7 \times 2 = 3,780$ USD for the week.

This means that using this scam, Rogue Agency Co can make profit of up to 64,820 USD per week! That is pure profit in excess of 3 Million USD per year!

Why this works

Agency clients will most often be asked for large up-front payments with order (with typically at least 60% being paid before the event is even held) and the balance due in 30 days.

There is therefore no justification whatsoever for agencies using the interpreters as a source of supplier credit, but most interpreters are ignorant of the fact, and have no direct relationship with the end client, so they are unaware of the true circumstances.

This also works on the basis that the Agency believe that they will never have repeat business in the market where they recruit the interpreters (this means it applies mostly when agencies are working outside their home market).

This is because interpreters are not fools, and since we are so few, we mainly work with each other all the time, so we share blacklists of Rogue Agencies (sadly there are so many of them these days).

This means that if an agency hopes to be back in a location in a couple of years' time, it cannot use this technique.

It can only work if the agency estimates it will not be active in a given market for at least 3 years, in which time it may have changed name or management or can

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otherwise find an excuse for saying things were different in the past: before using the same technique again.

Victims

The victims here are the interpreters. They are the ones who get burned by the Rogue Agency.

Clients may also suffer some reputational fall-out from having been involved in the event that gave rise to the scam, but even when they are informed of what has happened, very often they are legitimately innocent of any collusion and, worse, unable to intervene.

At best, clients may plead the interpreters' case with the Rogue Agency, but they have no real power.

Clients may be incensed that they are alleged to have made complaints, but may accept this to be the case after the event, because they may have staff in attendance who may have made adverse comments of which they are unaware; in such cases they may fear it is all just a misunderstanding but will be unable to persuade the Rogue Agency to pay, since its original purpose was never to do so in the first place.

How to protect your event

It is wise, in the case of any event, to appoint a single spokesperson for the end client who is responsible for the success of the interpreting (and best if they are also responsible for the event as a whole).

That person should reveal their contact direct to the interpreters (whilst remaining aware that interpreters are barred by tradition from contacting them direct).

In order to avoid there being any conflict of interest with the agency, this is best done in the form of a special event contact email / event business phone that is circulated not just to interpreters, but also to sound equipment providers, booth hire companies, hotel staff etc.

Such details should NOT be handed down to Agencies for circulation, but should form part of the interpreter briefing pack issued direct to the interpreters together with copies of slides and / or speeches to be delivered on a daily basis.

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It will become obvious that Rogue Agency is acting unfairly when more than one or two interpreters who worked at the event contact the client afterwards to inform them of non-payment, in such cases if payment timing is suitably short, it may even be possible to divert at least the final 30% instalment due to the Agency direct to interpreters, but since interpreters are often merely subcontractors, this is pretty unlikely.

Interpreters had best defend themselves by refusing to accept supplier credit arrangements and refusing to be flexible on such arrangements until after, say the third event with the same agency, in order to have a situation where the trustworthiness of the agency involved has been proven before an order from them is accepted.

Joint action by colleagues is vital, and this is why interpreter associations exist. And also one reason why colleagues inform each other of who is actively bidding on jobs, to protect themselves and each other from dishonest dealings of this kind.

You can avoid getting your body involved with blacklisted agents.

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Scam no 4 – Equipment Provider Referral Scam

This is a scam whereby an agency, which has little or no intention of working honestly with interpreters, wangles the position of agent for a firm that provides specialist interpreting equipment, in order to be contacted as soon as there is an enquiry about such equipment (interpreter consoles, booths etc.)-

In one particularly flagrant case, a Rogue Agency purchased some old second hand equipment from a highly reputable provider, and then became exclusive agent for that company for all South East Asia.

That meant that they were informed almost before anyone else of events that were likely to be coming up in the area, and could provide bids on an identity theft basis well in advance of other providers.

They even went so far as to use that equipment for such events and try and sell training for the equipment (the most basic imaginable) to interpreters who were more qualified to use the equipment than the Rogue Agency staff who were offering “training” (mainly to foreign students readying to come onboard in the ID theft scam).

Of course, no reputable interpreters would work with them, and if they managed to secure the tender, they would never be hired or even consulted.

The rewards of the scam

Interpreting equipment hire is typically a much greater cost for event planners than the hire of interpreters themselves.

This can be the case by a factor of three or even more.

To use the same hypothetical event as before for the sake of comparability, at seven booths the daily total charged to the event client is say, $2700 \times 7 = 18,900$ USD per day = 132,300 USD for the week.

By owning the equipment outright, mere storage charges apply in excess of the initial capital expenditure for second-hand equipment which can be amortized over 5 years typically at say 1200 per booth = $1,200 \times 7 = 8,400$ USD outright / 5 years = 1,680 per annum, plus storage of say 12,000 per annum which equates to a total of 13,680 or 263 USD for the whole week!

This means that using this scam, Rogue Agency Co can make profit of up to 132,037 USD per week on old used equipment! That is pure profit in excess of 6.8 Million USD per year!

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Why this works

This works because the Agency takes on itself the purchase, storage, and “maintenance” (if it happens) of the interpreter equipment, such as booths, headsets for interpreters and for delegates, interpreter consoles, infra-red or digital diffusers, etc.

It is a scam in that the end user, the event organiser client is paying for top quality functioning equipment: but the reality is that such equipment can be so old it barely functions, breaks down often and provides sub-standard audio quality not just to interpreters, but also to delegates.

Sanitisation of headsets and booths may well be not performed at all, putting the health of delegates and interpreting staff at risk unnecessarily.

The risks to interpreters and delegates also includes that of acoustic shock, which has recently deafened a number of interpreters working at the Canadian parliament. There, their loss of earnings for the remainder of their professional life was covered by the state: but will a rogue agency cover its temporary staff, or client’s delegates? I very much doubt it.

Victims

Once again, the victims are both the end user clients and interpreting staff; when this is combined with the identity theft scam as is often the case, even direct employees (foreign students) are put at risk, under circumstances where not even the most basic legal requirements for employment are not fully met.

Delegates can also be harmed as stated above, and as usual, there will be no specific event insurance cover arranged by the rogue agency: if there is any event cover at all it will typically be paid for by the event organisers direct, thus making them double victims.

How to protect your event

There are some basic procedures that can protect you and your event from such profiteering: simply ask for a demonstration of the equipment proposed for the event, and take photographs of the items used for demonstration.

Any variations in the equipment provided at the venue should be covered by contract clauses designed to protect the end user. Suitable contracts can be provided by consultant interpreters.

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Always get more than one quotation for equipment for your event: reputable contractors will have no issues with your inspecting their storage facilities and their equipment, which should be labelled as sanitised and with a date.

You should also enquire about acoustic shock protection and ask to be shown the devices used to provide it: if none is available you should be very wary of using that provider.

If you call an equipment company and the phone is answered by a language services agency, alarm bells should be ringing. By all means ask for a quotation, but maximum precaution should be used when dealing with a firm where it is readily apparent that all is not as it appears: it is unlikely that things will be as they should be!

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Scam no 5 – Agency Direct Employment Scam

This scam involves a Rogue Agency offering full (or more commonly) part-time employment to foreign students on gap years, and then using them as interpreters during events ordered from the agency, even though the students are far from able to do the work.

This is a variant on the Identity Theft Scam, and is frequently run in combination with the same to maximise returns to the Rogue Agency.

It shares many of the same features (reliance on end clients who cannot speak the languages involved, victimising interpreters, and damaging local market reputation, etc.).

Because the students themselves are most unlikely to be aware of local job protection legislation (if any applies to part-time staff), they are often hired at well below local minimum rates, which means they tend to be treated as expendable.

In addition, they tend to be used for relatively menial linguistic tasks when not working as interpreters, such as translating diplomas etc., which means that local translators also find it difficult to find work of this simple kind, because unlike visiting students, they have to be able to afford to live in the local market and are not subsidising what is essentially a holiday.

For this very reason also, such staff may simply turn around and abandon a job if they find it to be too demanding: they have no professional reputation to defend and can easily just walk away, leaving everyone, from the Rogue Agency to the end client in the lurch.

The rewards of the scam

The figures are more or less comparable with those quoted for the Identity Theft Scam above: that is, based on the same basic assumptions, as stated below.

At two interpreters per booth there would be a daily total charged to the event client of say $900 \times 7 \times 2 = 9800$ USD per day = 68,600 USD for the week.

The difference here is whatever such part-time students can earn the agency as translators on a part time basis.

Assuming low output of say 2000 words per person per day, charged to end clients on the basis of 0.10 USD per word, that would come to $200 \text{ USD} \times 14 = 2800$ daily $\times 5 = 14,000$ USD for the week.

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The costs of 900 per month for the students will remain unchanged = 30 USD per day x 7 x 2 = 420 USD per day = 2940 USD for the week.

This means that using this scam, Rogue Agency Co can make profit of up to 79,660 USD per week! That is pure profit in excess of 4.1 Million USD per year!

Why this works

Please see what has been stated above for the Identity Theft Scam because the modus operandi is basically the same: it relies upon events being organised by experts who are not linguists, and it assumes there will be little or no repeat business.

As before, it is very harmful to the entire language services market in the event location.

Victims

Basically, apart from audio technicians and the Rogue Agency, everyone involved in the event (or who might have been such as real professional interpreters never able to bid for the job) is a victim.

An exhaustive examination of how this happens can be seen under the Identity Theft Scam above.

How to protect your event

Using consultant interpreters early on, at the event planning stage can help save a great deal of time and trouble.

Free tests should be organised with actual interpreters who have experience of working in similar fields, so that event organisers can verify that the people used actually know the topic, and can actually provide the service to the required level.

If they fail to turn up for some reason for the event, their contact details are provided so they can explain for themselves (typically in such circumstances they will recommend and provide contacts of suitable colleagues to replace them themselves).

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Event timetables can be planned in such a way as to minimise interpreting costs (in terms of sub-meetings, breakout groups and the like) and to ensure that the venue chosen is able to provide the facilities required, in addition to catering etc.

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Scam no 6 – Agency non-Co-operation with Preparation

This can just look like ineptitude, or failure to communicate with the end-user client, but in fact it is a scam.

The reason why is that by denying interpreters the opportunity to prepare for the subject matter of the event, they in fact harm not just the interpreters' performance and reputation, but can serve to cover the ineptitude of unqualified staff placed alongside proper professionals.

It serves as a means to disguise the difference between, say students on a gap year, and qualified interpreters, when the difference between them is not so large as to be obvious, such as when students are incapable of saying anything and just freeze, which the author has witnessed on various occasions.

This is a kind of compromise between the out and out Identity Theft or Direct Employment scams, and Late Payment or Fake Complaint Scams and accordingly is most often deployed as a combination to make the Rogue Agency appear to be beyond reproach and to maximise returns at the same time.

The rewards of the scam

Using the same basic event assumptions as throughout, the rewards of this scam are usually about half that of Identity Theft or Direct Employment, because typically fully qualified staff are used to at least half fill the booths.

Accordingly with only one properly qualified interpreter per booth, the daily total charged to the event client remains say $900 \times 7 \times 2 = 9800$ USD per day = 68,600 USD for the week.

Compared with the costs of 900 per month for the students = $30 \text{ USD per day} \times 7 = 210$ USD per day = 1470 USD for the week; however half of the staff are properly qualified interpreters who will have to be paid also at 900×7 per day = 44,100 USD per week. Thus total costs are 45,470 USD for the week

This means that using this scam, Rogue Agency Co can make profit of up to 23,030 USD per week, which is considerably reduced, but offset by the fact that discovery of what is happening is much more difficult. That produces maximum annual profit of nearly 1.2 Million USD, which is certainly worthwhile.

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Why this works

This is a scam where steps are taken by the Rogue Agency to prevent discovery of what they are up to. The agency blames the client for not communicating information, and thereby attempts to disguise what it is truly up to.

Please see what has been stated above for the Identity Theft Scam because the modus operandi is basically the same: it relies upon events being organised by experts who are not linguists, and it assumes there will be little or no repeat business.

As before, it is very harmful to the entire language services market in the event location.

But the difference in profit is based on the fact that the Rogue Agency maintains at least an appearance of having been honest in their dealings, while in reality the opposite is true.

The risks for the agency are greatly reduced, whilst the returns, while not so high as in more radical scam, are certainly not to be despised.

When all proceeds smoothly for the agency, nobody will even know that they have been involved in such a scam.

Victims

As always, interpreters themselves are the main victims, in that they lose out on the possibility of securing work since the market is shared with rank amateurs.

However, end user clients themselves are also victims, not only because the students used are frequently utterly incapable of doing a proper job: matters are made worse because even interpreters are denied the chance of preparing for the event properly, by being denied the information they were supposed to receive from speakers in advance.

It should be noted that the COVID 19 measures that have given rise to the frequent use of Remote Simultaneous Interpreting (RSI) platforms are especially liable to this kind of scam.

That is because “booth partners” are not just unknown people, but are often not even in the same country, never mind the same room together, and maybe not even on the same continent!

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Matters are made even worse because the fact of RSI means that, while the event is very often filmed (with interpreter output, despite the usual extra charges for recordings being negotiated and paid to interpreters, as is right and proper under international copyright law) screen output to interpreters will tend to focus upon speakers (for the sake of video recording output) which means no slide video feed may be made available to interpreters.

In such events it is also rare for interpreters to have a second screen available to display slides, or even a second computer available for the same purpose, even though they will typically use a second device (often a smartphone) with a separate connection to handle communications with technical staff (for handover instructions, and to receive vocabulary suggestions from “booth partners”, etc.

This means that the cognitive load (the amount of mental juggling) required is almost always much higher than in a normal simultaneous interpreting job, where all one has to do (!) is listen to the speaker's words and translate them instantly (simultaneously) into the target language, handle changes of source/target language on the interpreter console, read messages (vocabulary tips, or names of persons etc.) from written notes in the booth, noting numbers down as heard, and looking at speaker slides from screen or printout, and handle handover to the booth partners at a suitably agreed time after 20-30 minutes...

Once this is realised (with the fact that there is no time to be able to look at dictionaries, online or printed), one can see why properly qualified interpreters are essential to be able to perform optimally under these circumstances...and why it is vital to be able to handover after 20-30 minutes for the sake of sheer mental exhaustion, so that joint efforts can be sustained over an entire working day.

How to protect your event

The key, once more, is to use the services of properly qualified interpreter consultants to help set up the event, and to arrange who works in the booth.

A properly qualified interpreter is in a position to quickly and accurately assess if a colleague is up to scratch for the job involved, especially if the field is more technical in nature, and the interpreter is him/herself conversant with that field.

This means the wool is much less likely to be pulled over the eyes of the client, and the successful rendering of all event content into the target language can be assured, without shameful drops in quality when the qualified interpreter needs to take a break for the reasons stated above.

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Scam no 7 - Agency Fake Complaint Scam

This is where the Rogue Agency, after an event, claims that the end-user/event organiser client has made complaints to them about the quality of the interpreting service rendered.

They then use thus “complaint” as an excuse not to pay one or more interpreters who worked at the event, either in full, or at the very least to refuse to pay the full rate for their work and/or agreed refunds of expenses for their presence.

It should be clear that for this to be a scam at all, there must be not only no grounds for complaint, nor extenuating circumstances (such as failure of the technical setup, or sound output/input) and the like.

Genuine complaints that are justified should be addressed head on by interpreters, but with properly trained staff, unless there are overwhelming personal circumstances (illness or bereavement of a loved one), these should never arise.

It should be noted that in this scam, a complaint is almost never made during the event itself, but only once it is over.

If there are genuine causes for concern, booth partners will almost certainly be amongst the first to be aware of the issue, and should be liaising with the agency as soon as possible to suggest replacement colleagues who can be available at short notice so that booth output quality (the whole purpose of the job) is protected at all times.

The rewards of the scam

The scam depends upon the amount of the reduction the Rogue Agency gets to impose as a penalty upon the “offending” interpreters. (NB This will never be applied to directly employed staff under various other scams listed above – who at worst will be replaced in a matter of hours by equally unqualified personnel).

Using the same hypotheses as always for comparability purposes, at two interpreters per booth the daily total charged to the event client will be $900 \times 7 \times 2 = 9800$ USD per day = 68,600 USD for the week.

Typically not every booth will have their output challenged in this way, and at most 50% of booths will have reduced rates applied. In this example we have assumed 3 of the 7 booths have one interpreter challenged, with a refusal to pay anything.

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That will produce savings of $3 \times 900 \text{ USD per day} = 2700 \text{ USD per day} = 18,900 \text{ USD for the week}$.

This means that using this scam, Rogue Agency Co can make profit of up to 982,000 USD, almost 1 Million USD per year!

Why this works

Like most Rogue Agency scams, this all depends upon the interpreters having no direct contact with the end user client / event organiser.

It is frequently the case that interpreters who have direct contact with end user clients / event organisers will be accused of trying to compete with the agency, and they may be blacklisted for this.

Because this is a genuine and legitimate concern for many agencies, this has to be handled with great care by interpreters who try and protect themselves and their reputation.

Victims

Once again, it is the interpreters themselves who are the victims in such scams.

In this case there is no harm done to the event, nor to the organiser, sound technicians or the general market: only interpreters suffer.

How to protect your event

One way Rogue Agencies try and cover themselves is to give out temporary event-only phone numbers and/or emails. In that case it is prudent for an interpreter to use them to obtain more permanent contact.

This is best justified by all the interpreters working at an event nominating one person as contact for all event related matters: it is then up to him/her to obtain the contact details and distribute it to colleagues since prevention is better than cure.

In fact, all interpreters need to do to defend themselves is to collect the name and number of the end user client / event organiser contact person (to whom they will be introduced during the pre-event briefing on the morning of the first day).

There are many reasons interpreters can state to justify this: but mostly it is to ensure they have a point of contact for any queries they may have (since Rogue

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Agencies almost never maintain staff on site throughout any entire event) during the event itself.

It is also wise for interpreters to quietly collect the details of one or two delegates (they almost inevitably show up in events at the booths, either to congratulate interpreters – most often – or sometimes with special requests for technical assistance – most often faulty headsets and the like, to be handles by technicians).

If there are any spurious quality complaints, these delegates can then be called to witness on behalf of the interpreters accused, which usually has the effect of completely quieting any objections raised.

The better such delegates are treated and their problems solved, the more likely they are likely to prove invaluable allies to falsely accused interpreting staff.

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Scam no 8 - Last Minute Cancellation Scam

This is where the Rogue Agency, during an event (or in the case of a translation, while work is in progress), cancels the order to the interpreter or translator (often without any notice at all).

This can result in the interpreter or translator being completely unaware of the cancellation and only on completion of the service (or translation) finds out that the cancellation has taken place.

This is the situation the Rogue Agency wants: because it has “justifiable” grounds for refusing payment, whilst being able to take advantage of the service provided by the translator or interpreter to the end client, for its own invoicing: which then becomes a 100% profit exercise – all charges are made with zero costs!

One typical means of organising this would be by sending an email: when in the booth (actual or virtual) one rarely has the time to check email – and anyway, the cancellation email can be “deliberately” sent with a pre-programmed delay, which does not necessarily appear in the “sent” box, and thus cannot be proven to have been deliberately done.

The rewards of the scam

There is however a limit on the amount of actual cash that this scam actually yields, which is determined by the last-minute nature of the cancellation itself: vi. It is almost impossible for there to be more than say, a maximum of one half-day’s work affected per victim.

That being said, there is nothing stopping the Rogue Agency from applying this in multiple cases, for multiple events, or multiple translations at the same time.

This can in and of itself, be a powerful multiplying factor for limited *prima facie* returns.

Accordingly, let us assume that one half-day’s interpreting work for a booth is cancelled at the last minute (using some means that can be deemed to have been delivered, but may not have been seen in time by the interpreter or translator).

So on the basis of 500 USD per half day (a half day costing more than half a full day, for obvious reasons) per two interpreters (in a real or virtual booth) that produces savings of 1000 USD.

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As stated, that can easily be multiplied by the number of booths (or languages) at the event, which (for the purpose of illustration) can be deemed to be 6; thus 6×1000 USD is 6000 USD.

If that were to be done every day for a week (though this is an unlikely scenario unless the agency is large enough to have multiple simultaneous projects – which is often the case when this has arisen in reality) it would produce extra income for the week of $6,000 \times 7 = 42,000$ USD: that is in excess of 2 Million USD if annualised!

Why this works

Like most Rogue Agency scams, this all depends upon the interpreters having no direct contact with the end user client / event organiser. Please see the comments for *Scam 7* above.

It also works because for each individual interpreter the loss (especially on a multiple day event) is minimal, compared with the overall sum involved, and there is an all-too-human tendency to take the rough with the smooth, thus leading to taking an overall view and accepting a relatively small loss.

This means that in most cases the Rogue Agency gets away with this scot free: at most interpreters (or translators) will grumble a little, but and be angry for a while, but providing they are paid for the rest of their work, they are likely to accept what happened as being in good faith.

Victims

Once again, it is the interpreters themselves who are the only victims in such scams.

No harm done to the event, nor to the organiser, sound technicians or the general market: only interpreters suffer.

How to protect your event

You can try adding the solution referred to for *Scam 7* above, but more practical is the insertion of a full payment for late cancellation clause (less than 48-hours' notice) in the contract terms governing the interpreter's work.

This is standard term in most AIIC-based contracts, or in those prepared by similarly reputable national associations, such as AssolInterpeti in Italy, The Institute of Linguists in the UK, or the ATA in the US, etc.

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One cause of risk to such legal protection lies in the fact that, mainly because most interpreters, or rather, most laymen do not negotiate contracts, nowadays people have become used to “take it or leave it” contract terms dictated by others in the online and IT worlds.

It should be noted that in such domains it is the SUPPLIERS that set the terms whilst in the world of linguistic SERVICES it is most often the Agencies that define the conditions in their POs.

We must never forget that Terms of Work are NEGOTIABLE.

We never have to blindly accept any terms we do not like: such as no anti-cancellation clauses, or 30 (or even 60 or 90 day) payment terms!

Contracts are negotiated. And there is no such thing as tacit consent, in any major democracy.

If we, as colleagues, stick together, it will be very difficult for Rogue Agencies to stick it to us!

If we go soft, and end up competing on price and terms, it is a slippery slope. Who can accept Indian terms and conditions if we do not live in such a low-cost economy? Accept once, and the word will get out, and only low-cost jobs will be offered to us.

And it will be truly extremely tough to claw our way back to reasonable standards later.

In the final analysis, we fail to stand up for ourselves – at our own risk!

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Scam no 9 - Ambiguous Terms of Order Scam

This is where the Rogue Agency carefully prepares the terms of its Purchase Order (or Terms of service) in such a way that it glosses over certain fundamentally unacceptable terms that are only revealed to the working interpreters once the job has started.

This is a new form of duplicity, that has been made possible only through the rise of remote simultaneous interpreting and similar virtual forms of service provision.

Here is a specific description of what was done to me (and others) and how I found out about this (gradually during work).

The event itself was quite prestigious, and accordingly, since it was declared to be a French Government initiative with a keynote speech delivered by the President of the Republic, my guard was lowered, because it is well known to everyone that the state will never knowingly take part in events that could give rise to scandal.

All interpreters underwent audio testing the day before the event (immediately after being sent purchase orders), and were told that slides, event video feeds etc. would be provided for certain sessions, whilst others were working in panel discussions or Q&A session for which there would be no slides or video feeds.

Approximately 45 minutes before the start of the event, before the actual final testing, because I am bi-active in the event languages, I was asked to swap breakout assignment with another interpreter and do the keynote speech.

This meant that instead of being a reasonably long day (8 am to 6 pm), I was being asked to work for longer (until 8 pm) with a longer break in the middle of the day to allow me to recover from the morning's efforts.

I agreed, feeling that I would be being helpful to the client in that role, and went into audio testing (with no video feed or slides).

Once my sound was verified as being good, I was simply asked to keep talking, and interpret what was being said. That should have been a warning sign...

When the time came for me to handover to a partner, I sent a signal to state that I was ready to do so, but was told to keep going because the allotted partner had been delayed due to uncontrollable circumstances.

In fact nobody appeared for two hours, and I finished the first event (Keynote and discussions) with no handover, and started my break.

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I used that break to contact the agency to protest the conditions. I was told that I was due to start the next session in a different “virtual room”; only after 20 minutes did I discover that the same game was being played with me (with apologies for circumstances allegedly beyond their control).

Then, after several requests, at lunchtime on the event day, the Rogue Agency amended the Purchase Order to reduce the amount of my compensation in proportion to the actual minutes of talk time!

Luckily, I saw the email they sent to me with the amended terms, and I protested in no uncertain terms. At that point they verbally agreed to reinstate the longer amount of chargeable work, but did so condescendingly as if they were doing me a favour and not the other way round!

To cut a long story short, not only did no booth partner ever emerge during the day, I managed to contact all of the colleagues involved in the event (from all over Europe and the Americas) and NOBODY had a boothmate, NOBODY had any slides or materials to work with, NOBODY had any reliable time worked and EVERYBODY was hoodwinked .

To make matters even worse, all communications with the platform / technicians were done using a parallel link under WhatsApp, which not only added to the cognitive load, but also several chats were organised in parallel per room, with one for the event.

Interpreters were asked to monitor them all – this was clearly impossible, and probably intended to create further confusion (divide and rule).

The icing on the cake was the continuous background noise experienced by some colleagues, which put their hearing at risk of damage, with no acoustic protection whatever provided by the agency, the technicians or the platform.

The terms of the contractual purchase order were carefully drafted so as to be ambiguous about the charging basis: everyone assumed that we were going to charge for the time we made ourselves available to the agency, but their interpretation was that it was for talk time only!

Because the entire event was recorded, I managed to lead a revolt which at least obtained extra payments for the recordings to offset the very dishonest practises and deliberate ambiguity in terms and conditions.

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The Rogue Agents clearly knew all the above (and I set out my complaints to them in writing over three pages, with copies to all colleagues, with the right to reply). They neither apologised nor admitted any responsibility whatever, and I assume they intend to hoodwink others in a similar way in the future. I shall never work with them again!

The rewards of the scam

The scam depends upon the amount of the reduction the Rogue Agency gets to impose as a time penalty upon interpreters.

I should add that, because there were no video feeds at all, it is likely there were also platform / technician fee savings involved, but I am unable to quantify them.

The contract wording ensured that a total of 14 colleagues were hired for one day (for various times ranging from 8 am to 8 pm), but the way the distribution of work allocation was done, there should have been 28 interpreters instead (a saving of 50%) and with the exception of myself and one colleague only, nobody else managed to invoice a full day's work.

In theory, to organise the event with proper manning and cover, 28 interpreters should have been paid for a 12 hour day (1.5 days at full rate of USD 900+500 =1400 USD each) making a total fee for interpreting staff of 39,200 USD.

Instead, I and one colleague charged 1400 USD (using a recording surcharge to obtain what the proper figure should have been from the outset) and the remaining colleagues were only able to charge for a maximum of 3 hours talk time at USD 100, that is, 300 USD each.

Total costs to the agency, by means of its underhand contract terms and dishonest dealings came to $12 \times 300 = 3600$ USD plus 2×1400 USD, or in other words a total cost for the entire event of 6,400 USD.

This means that using this scam, Rogue Agency Co in one single day made illegitimate dishonest profits of 32,800 USD.

If there were enough colleagues to fool so they are able to do this constantly, the agency could clear almost 12 Million USD per year!

Why this works

Once again, this Rogue Agency scam depends upon the interpreters having no direct contact with the end user client / event organiser.

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It also depends very largely on interpreters having limited individual losses (no more than one day's work) and thus taking the view that it is not worth pursuing the agency for legal redress, or for other forms of legal remedy.

Damage is deliberately limited with this in mind: however, this cannot be done too often: firstly the agency will get the reputation of being a pariah very quickly (we talk to one another amongst colleagues without breaching any NDA terms, because NDAs are drafted to cover event content, and NOT about talking amongst ourselves as disgruntled suppliers).

In fact it is highly dubious as to whether any such NDA terms could be enforceable because at that point, we had become suppliers to the Agency, with rights to act collectively to enforce payment (as in usual liquidation proceedings etc.).

Victims

Once again, it is the interpreters themselves who are the victims in such scams.

In this case there is no harm done to the event, nor to the organiser, sound technicians or the general market: only interpreters suffer.

It is virtually certain that the end client (an emanation of the French Government) was in blissful ignorance of the dishonest dealings of their event organiser / agency.

How to protect your event

What we should have done, all of us who worked at this event, was reject the ambiguously worded Terms and Conditions in the PO forms sent to us, and insisted on compliance with our own standard Terms of working.

That is easily said with the benefit of hindsight, but the following should be recalled: the event took place virtually because of the global COVID panic in 2020.

Accordingly most (if not all of us) were working with very much reduced volumes of work, and may have been fairly desperate to secure the order for what was, in fact a fairly prestigious event (the Keynote Address I interpreted was delivered by President Macron).

This said, I do not necessarily advocate not signing Agency Terms and Conditions, but I (and my colleagues) should have been more cautious about the ambiguous

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readings in the contract wording, and in fact the very existence of ambiguous wording should have raised alarm bells for all of us.

In the final analysis, the event became one of the most unpleasant experiences I have ever undergone in my working lifetime of more than 35 years.

That in itself is a cautionary tale, which will certainly lead me to be far more prudent about signing up with even well recommended clients (as in this case), and so should all readers be.

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Scam no 10 - Platform Client Theft Scam

This is where the Rogue Agency is masquerading as a remote interpreting platform (or as the corollary also applies, a Remote Interpreting Platform acts as a Rogue Agency).

Changes in approach to hosting events brought about by the COVID outbreak have been turned to their advantage by the dishonest to make “legal” profits, at the expense of their victims.

The whole system depends upon the public’s ignorance of interpreting (and some interpreters are also naïve), which leads unscrupulous platforms to “certify” interpreters as being able to push the appropriate software buttons (as they would do on a normal interpreting console)_and thus be approved for work on the platform.

This enables a platform to create lists of “certified” interpreters, which is in itself another scam, since there are no tests of interpreter’s ability to perform the job (for which years of study are required leading to appropriate professional qualifications).

This then enables residents in third world countries to compete with those who have first world costs to bear on an “equal” footing, driving prices down and accepting charges by the hour (or worse still by the minute) where such charges are inappropriate.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that in some places (e.g. India, Pakistan, etc.) many people are convinced they are English A (native) speakers, whereas in fact they may be Urdu or Hindi A native speakers, and their English can be so heavily accented as to be incomprehensible. But none of this concerns the certifying platforms, merely motivated by price.

The Platform operates as a pure-blood Rogue Agency, and not as a technical platform but are disguised as offering technical solutions only: they appear to leave the hire of interpreters hiring to their (most exclusive) partner(s).

In fact they “encourage” interpreters to “share” identities of their clients for an introductory “finders” fee: but this is almost never paid, and interpreters mostly never hear from their long-standing clients ever again.

The Rogue Agency / Platform also claim a training fee, charged to the end client, and not to interpreters, so interpreters will not object to them (and maybe even sympathize them for excess demand).

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However, the very existence of the training fee is to deter clients from engaging their own interpreters (which client would spend 90 USD more to hire their own interpreters if the platform offers a waiver for using their “certified” interpreters?).

The rewards of the scam

Let us illustrate what that certificate is, as a Rogue Agency/Platform tool to secure “per head” fees on interpreters.

The Rogue Agency/Platform takes a large cut on interpreters’ “training” fees before outsourcing the job to its “pure” agency arm to earn the balance from interpreters.

This is the way for them to make money, and the remote platform fees are not comparable to the mark-up on interpreter costs.

Using the same hypotheses as always for comparability purposes, at two interpreters per booth the daily total charged to the event client will be $900 \times 7 \times 2 = 9800$ USD per day = 68,600 USD for the week.

They will take a mark-up of say 50% of the interpreter fees, being 34,300 USD: and in addition charge certification fees to all interpreters, say $14 \times 90 =$ another 1260 USD per week, for absolutely nothing!

This means that using this scam, Rogue Platform / Agency Co can make profit of more than 1,750,000 USD each year!

Why this works

When the interpreters’ job was kept to a platform company only with such a fee barrier changed to the client, the Rogue Agency element managed to carry out the next steps to enjoy interpreter “head fees” and secure they received all the jobs to eat up all the “meat” on the bones of any event.

Many interpreters will have heard that their clients have chosen the Rogue Platform / Agency as the platform and look for Rogue Platform / Agency “certified” interpreters.

Either an interpreter pays them to get on their roster for just once (and maybe never again), or the client fails in their interpreter search and takes the Rogue Platform / Agency proposals on interpreters.

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Victims

Once again, it is the interpreters who are the victims in such scams.

In this case there is no harm done to the event, nor to the organiser, sound technicians or the general market: only interpreters suffer.

They suffer because in fact they end up paying the Rogue Platform / Agency to give away their clients to them, because they are unaware that the Rogue Platform / Agency is working as competitor, to their detriment only.

How to protect your event

At present there seems to be only one way interpreters and clients can protect themselves from the Rogue Platform / Agency scam, and that is to have nothing to do with any company that has both roles, because of the underlying conflicts of interest.

The guilty parties will claim all they are doing is applying Group vertical integration tactics to the field of interpreting: unfortunately that is not the case, because here there are victims, namely the interpreters themselves.

In addition, Rogue Platforms / Agencies must be aware that they are operating on the borderline of legality and fraud, or else they would not have structured themselves as two separate legal entities, even though there are cross-shareholdings and directorships.

That in and of itself is enough to raise suspicions of underhand dealings – which should warn all honest businesses to steer well clear!

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Scam no 11 - Bogus Client Scams

This is an exception: there is no agency involved, but instead a direct client contacts the provider (of translating or interpreting services) and purports to be a real client.

The purpose of the scam is to obtain the translation of speech or documents, for which the bogus client has no intention of paying.

This has happened to me on various occasions: once with a bogus art magazine, who hired me for two months work, but only paid for one, claiming that their funding had dried up. (In fact they found another provider to work for them after leaving me with an unpaid bill for thousands (years ago but it still rankles).

Another case was, if anything even worse. I was contacted through my online profile by someone purporting to be a partner in a small London law firm, practising in criminal law.

They required items to be translated from French AND German (being evidence and Police reports from a series of drug raids in Luxembourg).

Work orders were issued for 10 days of work, and then, on completion, I was asked if I was ready to do more, and another 10 days of work was ordered. And so it ensured until, after 30 days, my first invoice fell due for settlement, at which point I sent out a late payment reminder (having by then done 40 + days of work).

At that point, all communications failed: there was no answer to emails, phone numbers ceased to work and so on. I spoke to my brother (who is also a senior solicitor in the UK, who sent in detectives...and discovered the address was a fake, as was the law firm!

But these are not the only instances of bogus clients I have encountered (and probably not the last ones either!)

The rewards of the scam

The scam depends upon the amount of the work that the Bogus Client can persuade the translator or interpreter to do before he/she is revealed as not being in good faith.

But in each of the two extreme cases above, the amount involved was in excess of one full month's work: close to 12,000 USD.

Obviously, because of the one-off nature of the scams, they cannot be annualised, but the damage to personal earnings was considerable!

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Why this works

Clearly, this all depends upon there being no real direct contact with the end user client, and accordingly no come-back when no payment is made.

Victims

It is the linguistic service providers themselves who are the only victims in such scams.

How to protect yourself

No matter through what means one is contacted by a prospective client, it is incumbent upon each professional to attempt to protect themselves against this kind of dishonesty.

At least (as I have learned the hard way) searches on the bona fide of the client should be performed (visiting websites, and taking what references are available).

A view should be taken of what to do if enforcement becomes necessary for the debts (what does one do with a rogue Chinese or Indian client?). If there is no answer, it is probably best to decline the work, rather than run the risk of turning away real paying work for illusions.

A judgement should also be taken about taking an up-front fee for large jobs from unknown clients (as happened in the case of the bogus arts review), Because <I did so, my losses were limited, but occurred nonetheless.

In the final analysis, there is no complete watertight defence: I recall reading an International Chamber of Commerce report where a fraud was set up involving the creation of an entirely fictitious bank branch in Switzerland for a real bank in order to do similar frauds.

This was only exposed because a local person (despite signs outside the branch saying it was a special agency that did not receive customers except by appointment) called the bank HQ to ask for an appointment and was told there was no branch at the location...and police then investigated...but just came too late!

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