

**Remote Simultaneous Interpreting (RSI)  
Practical Guidelines for Successful Events**

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**Introduction**

The following is supplemental to our standard Interpreting Services Contract and been prepared to address real-world issues that have arisen during RSI events in the recent past.

Therefore, please take the time to read through this document carefully- compliance is intended to ensure success; the corollary is that failure to comply is almost certain to guarantee failure, for which NO RESPONSIBILITY WILL BE ACCEPTED, since FAIR NOTICE OF THE RISK is provided hereby.

The Introduction explains why certain issues are handled as suggested.

The main body of the document gives practical guidelines for all parties to set an event up so it can take place with minimum disruption arising from its being held in a virtual context.

## **Remote Simultaneous Interpreting (RSI)** ***Practical Guidelines for Successful Events***

### ***Platforms and Qualifications***

There are several platforms upon which remote events may be held using simultaneous interpreting.

Some platforms are not specifically intended for the provision of interpreting services, such as Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams etc.

Of these, some may have grafted on certain rudimentary interpreting channels (such as Zoom) and others may be converted to provide interpreting using special tools, such as AIIC Italy's Voices App.

Some platforms have also been designed specifically with a view to providing Interpreting during "live" events and meetings held in different locations.

However, none of these platforms are in a position to offer interpreting without the skills of human interpreters, to operate the equipment and provide the service to listeners of the interpreted channels.

Certain platforms have decided to operate as if they were language service providers (LSPs), and have even gone so far as to "certify" as interpretation professionals as "qualified".

It should be clear that such "certification" is in no way any proof of the ability of the "interpreter" to actually perform the service that the end-client is paying for.

Instead, that "qualification" only "certifies" that these people are able to "push the buttons" required in order to operate the platform correctly.

The ability to perform simultaneous interpretation correctly is the most difficult linguistic achievement known to mankind.

Qualifications in the field are provided by various Universities and Institutes of Higher Education, and MAY lead to people being accepted by examination and peer review as members of various national professional bodies or the international association of Interpreters: AIIC.

### ***Besides Interpreting, What Happens in a Physical Booth***

Understanding what interpreters actually do is key to accommodating their needs in a virtual environment.

Why should their needs be taken into consideration? Why should they be special? Briefly, because people who do not speak the event language need to be able to understand the content, and are often prepared to pay (even quite large amounts) in order to do so.

The fact is that simultaneous interpreting is not just the ultimate skill in language services, but few people pause to think what it actually entails: listening to what is being said in one language (regardless of topic) and then at the same time (or at any rate with a minimal time-lag) conveying the same meaning in a different language.

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What this means is there is no time to look up any words in any dictionaries, no time to communicate with technicians to fix any technical issues, no time to pause for a drink of water, no time for toilet breaks, no time to cough, nor sneeze etc.

Because of the extreme difficulty a number of practises have arisen that have been designed to accommodate interpreter needs so that they can actually provide their service.

First and foremost is the realisation that the work involved is tremendously demanding intellectually. Human beings need to take a break (traditionally every 20-30 minutes) in order to recharge their batteries so that they can continue to work optimally.

This is such an important requirement every professional association of interpreters world-wide has enshrined this in their rules of membership. In fact, the author knows of NO professional who accepts working without such breaks and regular handovers anywhere in the world.

In fact, where topics are extremely demanding, instead of interpreters working in teams of two, sometimes teams of three working a so-called “round-robin” system with two turns off and one term on, are required.

Even so, mental exhaustion are real issues that need to be handled, together with stress etc. arising from the extreme conditions of such work.

But the system of handovers enables not only rest period, but toilet breaks to be accommodated, and in certain emergencies, coughing fits to be accommodated (the partner takes over temporarily at very short notice).

Sneezes are usually handled by muting the microphone temporarily – even though this inevitably breaks up the smooth flow of the output, just as it would do in natural speech. The same tactic enables sips of water to be taken while working to ensure the physical voice system does not break down.

Other arrangements that prevail in the booth are that the partner who is not “live” handles technicians (in silence and via gestures) performing technical fixes to any issues on the set of duplicate equipment not actually in use.

The booth partner that is not “live” also arranges for adequate supplies of water for the booth to be available, and also, when his partner is working, provides useful assistance such as by writing out on paper any figures mentioned by speakers that are not noted in previously provided handouts or on slides visible in the booth.

He/she also listens to the colleague’s output and may suggest words in writing similarly jotted down on paper when the colleague gets stuck with a particular word (it happens to everyone).

All booth partners gesture to each other to indicate that they are ready to handover the live role to one another (at the end of the next sentence) once the agreed time has elapsed (or once they sense that their partner is flagging or otherwise having difficulty in performing).

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All of this needs to be understood, because all of these functions need to be accommodated in the virtual world in remote simultaneous interpreting, and in such a way that it does not disturb the intellectual processes at work in the interpreter who is actually working live.

For example, if technicians message an interpreter who is actually interpreting, the interpreter has to make a choice between answering the technician and cutting off the work of interpreting, or ignoring the technician.

This applies to all messages a technician may send, including instructions to change over for technical or timing reasons etc.

Failure to understand that this is the case will lead to either frustration with interpreters or to poor or unusable output, or, in most circumstances, both!

Some platforms state they have been designed by interpreters: at present there are little signs of any being designed to handle the real-world requirements of the job.

### **Infrastructure**

At present interpreters are being asked to bear all the capital expenditure costs of providing the infrastructure required for successful remote interpreting.

The argument is that since interpreters no longer have to travel to physical locations, travel time, and accommodation costs are eliminated, and the cost saving is passed on to Clients, neatly avoiding the issue of infrastructure costs (and the amenity that arises from doing so - maybe what attracted some people to this highly demanding profession in the first place).

The fact remains that in physical events, all infrastructure items are provided free of cost to interpreters: interpreter headsets (even though some prefer to use their own), soundproof booths, sound technicians, channel infrastructure (provision of separate channels per language pair and foldback/return, switching, labelling etc.) seating, workplace ventilation and heating / air conditioning, the provision of broadband internet, all furnishings, and on-site catering including the provision of water (and often coffee) on demand, etc.

In remote interpreting all the above has to be provided by the interpreter at their own cost, which can be considerable, and often to demanding specifications such as these (provided by an Australian company, but by no means atypical):

### **Hardware**

- PC: Core i5 (Recommended **CPU score** above 3500), 4GB RAM, Windows 8 / MAC High Sierra or higher
- Professional desktop microphone along with over-ear headphones  
**Blue Yeti Nano** along with over-ear headphones is recommended (e.g. Sennheiser HD200 PRO)  
**Blue Yeti**, Shure SM7B or Audio-Technica AT2020USB can be used as an alternative solution  
Headphones with 3.5mm jack to be connected directly to microphone port  
Adding a microphone windscreen will help to block out background noise and remove unwanted sounds  
OR
- USB headset with noise cancelling feature  
**Sennheiser SC260 USB** is recommended as higher-quality USB headset  
**Sennheiser SC 70 USB** is recommended on a budget.  
**Sennheiser SC 60 CTRL** Sennheiser **SC 75 CTRL** are also approved as a budget solution
- No Bluetooth headsets/headphones are allowed
- USB Ethernet adapter for slim MAC/Laptop

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### Internet

- **Minimum** requirements: 2 Mbps download / 2 Mbps upload **Recommended:** 10 Mbps download / 4 Mbps upload *and higher*
- Ping value below 50, jitter below 15. Use [speedtest](#) link to measure bandwidth and latency
- Ethernet cable connection is an absolute must

### Software

- **TeamViewer** software and **Google Chrome** installed on the laptop/computer/MAC

Issues such as food and drink etc. and the use of other facilities (bathrooms etc.) are taken for granted: as yet no interpreter has (to my knowledge) suggested charging rent for the use of their own facilities, but there is no logical reason why this should not occur.

Indeed the arguments for doing so become very much easier to quantify when interpreting Hub booths are used for the provision of remote services for events elsewhere. There seems to be no justification whatsoever for failing to pass this cost on to the end client, since they will ultimately benefit in terms of reliable connections, guaranteed background silence, and many other improvements that arise from the fact of having physical booths to operate from, in a hybrid remote form.

### Health and Safety

All of this is entirely separate from the issues of the health and safety of interpreters, that have been highlighted through various instances of acoustic shock (hearing damage) that has affected a number of interpreters when working remotely.

Since this has led to forced retirement of people and permanent disablement in certain cases, there is abundant literature available on the topic, best summarised in the AIIC Health and Safety Committee (THC) in its second report here:

<https://aiic.org/document/9506/THC%20Test%20RSI%20platforms%202020.pdf>

(the full technical report is here:

[https://aiic.org/document/9505/THC%20Test\\_AiR\\_AIIC.pdf](https://aiic.org/document/9505/THC%20Test_AiR_AIIC.pdf)).

The current situation is one where the entire burden of protecting their hearing is being placed upon interpreters themselves, and that is clearly unacceptable.

Accordingly, clients must understand that they will be asked to contribute indirectly to the costs of providing such protection, in the form of additional fee charges.

### Educating Third Parties (Attendees, Clients, Agencies, Event Organisers & Hosts)

Interpreters shall NOT be expected to:

1. Explain to the Event Organisers, Hosts or Clients how to enable interpreting on the platform being used.
2. Give instruction to delegates as regards how to access interpreting. This must be done by Event Organisers, Hosts or Clients IN THE TARGET LANGUAGES for the Event (e.g. via a slideshow before the meeting starts). (Also see *Attendee Briefings* below).
3. Enable the interpreting feature on Zoom (or other similar platforms). This shall be performed by the Event Organisers, Hosts or Clients before the start of the event.

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4. Organise Question and Answer Sessions. Proposals must be made in advance of the Event by the Event Organisers, Hosts or Clients and will be subject to approval by the interpreters. (See *Requirements for Logging On* and *Questions and Answers* below).
5. Perform audio, computer or network technical support. All systems must be checked in advance of the Event by the Event Organisers, Hosts or Clients, and be maintained in a state of readiness from immediately prior to the event start time until after the end of the Event.
6. Recommend the use of Quality Headsets (and/or Microphones) for all Speakers (including in Questions and Answer Sessions) – MUST be performed by Event Organisers, Hosts AND Clients to ALL Delegates and attendees)

**Attendee Briefings**

1. Interpreters shall NOT be expected to give instruction to delegates as regards how to access interpreting. This must be done by Event Organisers, Hosts or Clients IN THE TARGET LANGUAGES for the Event (e.g. via a slideshow before the meeting starts).
2. Attendees should be asked to ensure that their microphone is muted except when actually speaking (when permitted by the Event Host / Moderator) to enable everyone to hear and understand what is said.
3. For the same reason Attendees should be asked not to speak at the same time as anyone else and avoid interruptions and cross-talk.
4. If questions are to be put, they should be specified in the Q&A chat-box (on Zoom) or the equivalent on other platform. (See *Requirements for Logging On* and *Questions and Answers* below).
5. If clarification is required from a questioner or if something needs to be repeated, a video feed will need to be provided to speakers / attendees to enable interpreters to make a raised hand signal, which must be watched for by all attendees.

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### **Best Practise**

#### **Questions about the Technical Set-up**

1. Is the Event Organiser, Host or Client a Language Service Company or Agency?
2. Has the Event Organiser, Host or Client previously organised a Remote Simultaneous Interpreting Event?
3. What is the nature of the Event (Webinar, Briefing, Interactive Meeting, Marketplace etc.) and what is the intended outcome (sales, education, research, etc.)?
4. Will there be a Moderator or Host?
5. Will there be an interpreting partner? (N.B THIS IS A NON-NEGOTIABLE REQUIREMENT FOR ALL EVENTS OF MORE THAN 30 MINUTES DURATION)
6. What platform will be used? (NB If Zoom, who co-ordinates the interpreting channels, and who is responsible for providing the required training: the Event Organiser, Host or Client?)
7. Is there need of a secondary telephone bridge (or backup channel) for interpreters (for communications with Technicians, the Event Organiser, Host or Client)
8. Is the meeting being livestreamed or recorded (NB. SUPPLEMENTARY CHARGES APPLY IN EITHER CASE)
9. Specifically, what are the Names and TWO TESTED AND FUNCTIONING METHODS FOR CONTACTING the Technicians responsible for IT and audio.
10. When is the *Pre-Event Technical Check* (see below) with all parties (Interpreters, Technicians, the Event Organiser, Host and Client) planned for (is there sufficient time to enable solutions to any issues discovered to be found BEFORE the event?)

#### **Requirements for Logging On, and Interpreter Set-up**

1. Attendees (physically present or via remote link) shall be briefed about how to access interpreting, by Event Organisers, Hosts or Clients IN THE TARGET LANGUAGES for the Event (e.g. via a slideshow before the meeting starts). See *Attendee Briefings* and *Educating Third Parties 2.* above.
2. The Interpreting function (where necessary) shall be configured by the Event Organisers, Hosts or Clients, at rehearsals, and just prior to the Event, following which IT SHALL AT NO TIME BE SWITCHED OFF UNTIL THE END OF THE EVENT.
3. If an Event requires discussions or dialogue between delegates, attendees and/or panellists, the Interpreters must be provided with the following:
  - a. Scripts for introducing each successive speaker (in the correct order);
  - b. Any scripts for speeches (or other forms of intervention),
  - c. Signals (oral and /or gestural) for turn-taking amongst delegates, attendees and/or panellists (as opposed to Interpreters – covered separately under *Virtual Booth and Interpreter Handovers* below).
4. When the Event is an interactive meetings, Interpreters may be visible to Attendees, and ever take part in discussions. Under such circumstances it is recommended that they be in charge of managing the platform, to ensure all voices are heard.

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### **Handling Questions and Answers**

1. Identify and provide working contact details for the person who will monitor the Chat Box for questions (NB. This cannot be an Interpreter).
2. (ONLY if there is more than one interpreter – viz. for events of more than 30 minutes or with more than two Event languages): which interpreter shall interpret the questions (and answers)?
5. What signal will be used to indicate that Event Organisers, Hosts, Clients, Panellists, Delegates (or other Attendees) or Interpreters wish to comment or elucidate? Does the platform provide a “raised hand” function?
6. Will microphones be used to ask questions orally (not applicable for 100% virtual events)?
7. Is open dialogue (such as between Panellists in a Group Meeting context) intended? If so, which of the above provisions will apply?

### **Virtual Booth & Interpreter Handovers**

1. One Virtual Booth should be set up for each language pair:
  - a. Either (with Zoom or similar platforms) using a second device to log into the same meeting to listen to the boothmate on the interpreting channel, or
  - b. (Preferred) using a video call on a second device to coordinate with the boothmate. This approach enables written messages to be passed between partners as in a physical booth, and for hand-signals such as the letter X for handover, etc.
  - c. It may be possible (on certain platforms only) to log onto a second video application (such as Google Meet, Skype, Whereby, Viber etc.) for coordinating with interpreting boothmates (But subject to the internet connection being stable and having sufficient bandwidth not to prejudice the main connection)
2. The Virtual Booth should be used initially to establish:
  - a. Which channel (or Application) will be used;
  - b. If video communication can be used (preferred – see *Item 1. b.* above);
  - c. How often switching should take place between interpreter booth partners; and
  - d. What hand signal should be used to indicate switching (e.g. some people prefer to use a thumbs-up sign).
3. It should be noted that ALL Virtual Booths require at least TWO audio channels to be handled: one for the event and one for the booth partner.
4. (Only if Item 1.c) above does not apply): a separate device will be required to handle the second audio channel.
  - a. The original audio is provided to the current interpreter’s headphones, via the web platform;
  - b. All interpreters set up a virtual booth to coordinate with colleagues (one booth per language), and
  - c. Interpreters speak into the microphones and listen to the output, either using separate listening devices (two monaural headphones, or headphones plus earbuds, or mixed via a miniature mixing desk etc.).
  - d. The virtual booth must be set up in advance with all booth partners and its use must be practised until complete familiarity is achieved **PRIOR TO THE EVENT.**

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### Non-Negotiable Preconditions

#### Pre-Event Technical Check

- How will delegates be informed about how to access interpreting (see also *Educating Third Parties 1.*) ?
- Who will provide the slides for delegates on how to hear interpreting (Event Organisers, Hosts or Clients (see also *Educating Third Parties 2.*) ?
- Who is responsible for confirming that the Event's Interpreting Channels are enabled (Technicians, the Event Organiser, Host and/or Client)?
- Who is responsible for testing sound quality on ALL connections (Technicians, the Event Organiser, Host and/or Client)?
- Who is responsible for problem solving on ALL Technical issues (Technicians, the Event Organiser, Host and/or Client – if split between parties, identify each and define area of responsibility)?

#### Pre-Event Agreements

- How will the Question and Answer Process be managed (who specifically will be Host, who will analyse questions / submit them to any panels / log them for future use / research, etc.)?
- Interpreter Turn-taking Approach and Timing must be agreed in advance of the Event (e.g. Who does return, how relay is handled, and handover every 20 minutes or sooner?) by all relevant parties
- Primary Event Contact (Event Organiser, Host and/or Client) to be shared with all relevant parties.
- All relevant preparatory documents, notes and slides (etc.) to be provided to interpreters at least 48 hours in advance of the event (Who is responsible for testing sound quality on ALL connections (by the Event Organiser, Host and/or Client).

#### Advance Checklist for interpreters

- Is the RSI facility (virtual booth, home office etc.)? fully set up and ready?
- Has the *Pre-Event Technical Check* been completed successfully?
- Have all parties to the *Pre-Event Technical Check* confirmed their roles?
- Have you double-checked your audio systems (microphones, headphones and in-ear devices, acoustic shock protection, etc.)?
- Have you double-checked your working location will remain quiet throughout the event?
- Have all Chat and Question and Answer processes been completed, with all parties briefed and their roles confirmed?
- Have the arrangements for attendees accessing the interpreting channel been approved by the Client / Host in advance of the event?
- Is there a specific policy for communicating with all the various classes of attendee in operation and tested prior to the start of the Event?
- Has the virtual booth setup been tested and practised with the booth partner?

***NB: Please remember that the unforeseeable can always happen. Examples could involve vehicles crashing outside where an interpreter is working, or earthquakes at venues, riots, civil commotions and the like, extreme weather conditions, such as hurricanes and typhoons; the full list is endless, while prevention has its limits.***