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South African Translators' Institute

newsletter

Recognizing scams in the translation industry
Cyber security tips: How to avoid scams

RECOGNIZING SCAMS IN THE TRANSLATION INDUSTRY

Scams targeting translators, agencies, and clients have unfortunately become a common issue in the translation world. Far from being an isolated problem, fraudulent schemes affect freelancers and companies alike.

How translation scams work

Fraudsters often steal CVs from actual translators, either by downloading them from online directories or posing as agencies or project managers. This stolen information allows them to pose as legitimate professionals. Often, they alter personal information and contact details on the CV, though some even keep the original name, committing identity theft. Once they've created a "fake" translator profile, they launch mass spam campaigns targeting agencies or individual translators.

Here's where the scam typically begins. If a translator or agency responds, the fraudster proposes a payment plan with an upfront 50% deposit and the remaining 50% upon completion. After an agreement is reached, they send a document to be translated along with a collaboration contract that appears genuine, often including a digital signature.

Shortly after, the translator or agency receives a follow-up email, supposedly from the scammer's bank, requesting verification. A quick check usually reveals that this email address is fake. The final blow comes when the scammer reaches out, claiming urgent financial or health issues and asking the translator or agency for an advance of a few hundred rand with promises of repayment within days.

Red flags: How to identify translation scams

Fortunately, scammers often reveal themselves through several tell-tale signs. Watch out for these red flags:

- Unsolicited offers: Scammers commonly send unsolicited applications via email, bypassing official appli-cation forms on agency websites.

- Blind copy (BCC) emails: Scam emails are typically sent as blind copies to multiple recipients, with no visible address.

- Poor language quality: Many scammers lack language proficiency, so their emails may contain numerous grammatical or stylistic errors.

- Inconsistent CV formatting: The CVs are usually patchwork, featuring in-consistent fonts and formats, and often contain contradictory or fake information, such as in-correct addresses, postal codes, and tax codes.

- Suspicious rates and experience: Their rates tend to be extremely low, and they often claim unrealistic years of experience. Also, a quick look at document properties may show an author name different from the person sending the CV.

By staying alert to these warning signs, translators and agencies can avoid falling into the traps set by fraudsters and keep their professional networks secure.

Cyber security tips: How to avoid scams

CYBER SECURITY TIPS: HOW TO AVOID SCAMS

VERIFY

As freelance translators and interpreters, you navigate a digital landscape that offers great opportunities but also presents significant risks. Scams targeting freelancers have become increasingly so-phisticated, and it's essential to arm yourself with knowledge to protect your hard work and earnings. Here are some practical tips to help you avoid scams and ensure you get paid for your services.

1. Verify client information

Before engaging with a potential client, conduct a background check. Look for:

- Company website: A professional website can be a good sign. Check for contact details and an about page.
- Social media presence: Established businesses often have social media profiles. Look for reviews and client interactions.

- Business registration: In South Africa, you can verify registered companies through the Companies and Intellectual Property Com-mission (CIPC).

2. Trust your instincts

Trust Your Own Instincts

If something feels off, it probably is. Be wary of:

- Poor communication: Unprofessional emails, grammar mistakes, or unclear instructions can be red flags.
- Urgent requests: Scammers often create a sense of urgency. Take your time to evaluate the offer.

3. Use secure payment methods

Opt for secure payment platforms that offer buyer and seller protection. Avoid:

- Wire transfers (Swift): These can be hard to trace and are often favored by scammers.

4. Request an upfront deposit

It's reasonable to ask for a partial payment upfront, especially for larger projects. This can help ensure that the client is serious and has the means to pay.

5. Create a contract

Always have a written agreement outlining:

- Scope of work: Clearly define what you'll deliver.
- Payment terms: Specify amounts, deadlines, and accepted payment me-thods.
- Revisions and rights: Clarify how many revisions are included and the rights to the translated material.

6. Avoid overcommitment

Be cautious of clients offering multiple projects with high rates that seem too good to be true. Scammers often entice free-lancers with unrealistic offers to lure them in.

7. Look for red flags

Common signs of potential scams include:

- Requests for personal information: Be wary if clients ask for sensitive personal data (like your ID number or bank account details) before any work is done.
- Unusual payment offers: If a client proposes to pay you significantly more than your usual rate, investigate further.

Cyber security tips: How to avoid scams

8. Educate yourself on common scams

Stay informed about the latest scams affecting freelancers. Familiarize yourself with common tactics, such as:

- Fake job postings: Scammers create fake listings to gather personal information.
- Overpayment scams: Clients transfer more than the agreed amount and ask you to refund the difference.

9. Network with other professionals

Connect with fellow freelancers through online forums or local groups. Sharing experiences and warnings about suspicious clients can help you and others stay alert.

10. Trust your gut

Finally, if something doesn't feel right, don't hesitate to walk away. It's better to lose a potential job than to risk your time and financial security.

As you continue to thrive in your freelance career, remember that being proactive about cybersecurity is essential. By following these tips, you can significantly reduce the risk of falling victim to scams and focus on what you do best—providing quality translation and interpretation services.

Stay safe and happy translating!

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Your language is our language

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