



Thought piece

A Day in Transcreation

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A day in the transcreation team will always be exciting and full of challenges. I get all sorts of tasks. They may involve subtitled marketing videos with tutorials for big cosmetics brands, looking at confidential images of designer pieces that are about to hit the runway, or staring at a two-word title (for longer than I care to admit). I'm always amazed at how witty a pun can be, but how hard it is to translate it.

One of the best things about our work at Alpha is that we are dedicated to specific clients, and this allows for an incredible degree of specialisation. For instance, I was translating some training material earlier this week, and one of the examples included a product name that has been phased out in the marketing content. You see, I know this because when the client's marketing team decided to change it, we were the ones in charge of updating all the files! So I asked our Project Manager to double-check with the client, and they were very pleased to see that we'd picked up on this.

However, this huge benefit also brings along a big challenge: we are really busy! The wide range of tasks we are responsible for means that our schedule is very fast-paced. Tasks can be due next week or even next month, but they are often due ASAP or within the next few hours. I actually need to keep myself in check, because I might become too absorbed in a task and forget to look at my e-mails, which might mean missing an urgent request—and trust me, you don't want to lose 30 out of the 60 minutes you have to check four web pages on desktop and mobile browsers before they go live in the afternoon. But it all works out in the end.

It's just about flexibility, being able to quickly switch between tasks and prioritise. A big file due next week can be worked on over several days, stopping to complete more urgent tasks along the way. We get lots of help from our Project Managers—I'd need an entire article devoted to how lost we'd be without them—but essentially, we manage our own workload and organise our workday ourselves based on the deadlines set by the client. Usually, as a project progresses through its "lifecycle" different stages will require a faster turnaround than others. The process is actually quite exciting.

With fashion clients, when a new collection comes out we first translate all the related content. The Project Managers will ready the files for translation and gather all the necessary reference material. Written descriptions can be a bit tricky and I often refer to pictures to create meaningful copy that will work best in my language rather than just say the exact same thing as the source text. This also involves some research, not only about more technical aspects like materials and components, but also about the current trends. To decide on the best way to say something, I might watch a video by an influencer on YouTube or read an article about related products in industry publications such as Vogue.

Communication with the client is also important. When something is unclear or if there are different ways to approach a translation, we always check with them. As I mentioned, we are well versed in our client's style and products so we can make many decisions ourselves, but ultimately they know best what kind of image they want to create, and we do need to make sure we are on-message. When time is of essence, I choose the option I find most suitable, but ask the Project Manager to let the client know and sometimes offer alternatives. This way we can save some time, but the client still has a say.

Another key aspect is team work. Translators working in the same language review each other's work and brainstorm together. But I also exchange lots of ideas and information with colleagues working in other languages. Someone might have done a related project, and provide valuable insights about the context, or they might inspire me with the way they've tackled a specific translation problem. Being part of a big team that works so closely together is just all sorts of good.

It is also crucial to check the reference material to know where text will be used. In many languages, a title isn't translated in the same way as a link or the subject line of an e-mail, and there might also be character restrictions that have to be taken into account. By working on the same kind of content all the time, eventually I've become familiarised with most types of copy, which makes me aware of potential issues to be avoided. This is also greatly beneficial because it reduces—often to zero!—the amount of changes that will be needed during the next step.

After the content is translated, it's time to make sure the copy sits well in context. Quality Assurance varies a lot depending on the type of project. For documentation there might be a PDF file that needs to be carefully read, whereas web pages will be looked at directly in the browser, and videos will need to be watched on a specialised platform that allows us to enter comments for the audio-visual team to see. Once everything has been flagged, it goes back to the team responsible for fixing the issues and then comes back to us for a final check. It actually is quite satisfying to see the translations in context and to make sure everything is absolutely perfect before it's published.

Some days are shorter, some days are longer, sometimes with a variety of tasks that need to be done in a single day. But you always feel that buzz of activity that seems to go hand in hand with the fashion world – and it's great to be in on the latest trends, before they've even happened.

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