

A day in the life of an interpreting agency

I will never forget going for an interview for my first full-time job and seeing a poster on the waiting room wall – “You cannot discover new oceans unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore”. I was just about to turn 19 and very impressionable and this is a saying still to this day that stays embellished on my mind and gives me courage every time I tackle something new.

For those of you that don't know me, my name is Victoria Gibson and I have been working as an interpreter based in Berkshire for 5 years, becoming fully qualified with SLI in 2005.

It had always been a dream of mine to start a business, and I had found out that local Deaf people were being provided with non-trained and non-registered interpreters.

A good enough reason for me to go for my dream and terptree was born!

The business started slowly and I worked in the office one day a week; managing bookings, dealing with invoices and administration duties. I was able to deal with other emails and correspondence on the go, but within the last 9 months or so the business has grown quite substantially and I am in the office managing the business at least three full days a week.

This is a fantastic compromise, giving me a wonderful balance of undertaking interpreting bookings as well as running the agency.

Here is a typical day:

9.00: Open up emails and computer system

9.10: Open and sort mail

9.30: Work on my priorities for the day

10.00: Deal with new bookings, check through present bookings and make contact with clients

The number of bookings that I receive varies; it could be anywhere from 1-10 at one time which is quite a considerable amount to manage. These bookings will be at different stages, so I have to make sure I am monitoring each booking and keeping effective communication with everyone.

I often receive last minute bookings that I try my best to fill. An example was one which I received on a Tuesday afternoon, looking for an interpreter for the Friday. Last minute bookings are normally the dread of most agencies, but I must admit I do enjoy such a challenge, there is nothing quite like getting the adrenalin pumping!

I started the search immediately and managed to find an available interpreter within the hour! The client was overjoyed as it meant that the Deaf person was able to attend the meeting.

This is one of the satisfying parts of the job.

11.00: Work on our website – terptree online www.terptree.co.uk

At the beginning of the year, we launched our new website, which is fully accessible in BSL and has a calendar of events for the local Deaf community. It also allows clients to book online and for interpreters to accept those bookings.

We also worked hard to gain approved status under the Agency Standards, as I felt that it was important as a Member of the Register and also a Full Member of ASLI to follow the guidance.

13.00: Lunch

13.30: Focus on various projects we are currently working on

A large project that we are working on at the moment is with SignTranslate – providing access to primary healthcare through online interpreting.

This is an exciting new development and will allow interpreters to log in when available and provide their services for appointments that would normally be unsupported.

15.30: Pay Interpreters invoices

I pay 10-20 interpreter invoices weekly by BACS and cheque/s. It is important that we look after our interpreters and pay them as quickly as possible so that they have faith in us and continue to accept bookings!

16.00: Prepare invoices for clients

As we all know, there can be a long wait to receive payments for bookings, but as an agency we deal with that wait and ensure that interpreters are paid on time. Sometimes because invoices have to go through various procedures to be approved before payment, an invoice would take as long as four months to be paid, despite the constant communication from us.

A recent invoice had been sent to the client that I was told would be covering the costs. They then sent it on to the Deaf person who processed it through Access to Work. I had processed the mileage rates at 40p per mile which was later denied by Access to Work, who only paid the travel on a basis of 25p per mile. I now have to find the additional amount from one of the parties involved!

This shows one clear benefit of working for an agency – having your invoices paid on time and not having to deal with all the palaver!

17.00: Off to the post box to send our mail

For me, the real benefit of running an interpreting agency is the freedom to take part in so many different things.

I have had the opportunity recently to run events for Deaf Awareness Week (DAW), one where we had a stall in Newbury market for a day and taught local people to spell their names! It was fantastic to get out there, meet with people and see the delight in their faces upon learning something new.

I also attended Reading Deaf Club's DAW event and was able to chat with the local Deaf community and explain about levels of qualification the importance of interpreter registration.

I am sure you have already gathered that I love running an interpreting agency and really enjoy the variety that it brings. One day out interpreting, another running a market stall and the next day working on exciting projects!

It is currently only me running the business, but I do receive continued advice from Business Link. I have a dedicated Business Adviser who has been a wonderful support for me. You cannot beat an outside eye so that you do not lose sight of the shore too much!

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