The State of the Interpreting Market

An In-Depth Look at a Fast-Growing Segment of the Language Services Market

By Hélène Pielmeier and Donald A. DePalma

January 2015
# Table of Contents

Topic...................................................................................................................... 1
Executive Summary................................................................................................. 2
Respondent Profile.................................................................................................... 3
The Demand for Interpretation.................................................................................. 5
  Interpreting in Context............................................................................................ 5
  Spanish and Chinese Dominate the Demand .......................................................... 6
The Demand for Interpretation Shows a Steady Increase........................................... 7
  Interpreting Needs Have Risen over the Past Five Years........................................ 7
  The Future Promises Further Growth...................................................................... 9
In-Person Interpreting Generates the Most Revenue.................................................. 11
Vendor Sourcing Practices......................................................................................... 13
  Procurement and Sourcing Models Vary................................................................. 13
    Most Purchases Are Made at the Business Unit Level............................................ 13
    Buyers Favor Delegating the Work to LSPs.......................................................... 13
    Most Buyers Purchase Translation from Their Interpreting Vendors...................... 15
Finding and Evaluating Vendors............................................................................... 15
  Word-of-Mouth Remains the Top Way to Find Vendors.......................................... 16
  Contractual Matters Dominate the List of Evaluation Criteria.................................. 17
Interpreter Qualifications......................................................................................... 19
  Buyers Want to See Some Formal Training............................................................ 19
Certification Requirements Depend on Interpreter Type........................................... 20
  Freelance Interpreters Are Expected to Carry Certifications.................................... 20
  In-House Interpreters Aren’t Held to the Same Level of Certification....................... 21
  Certifications Don’t Mean Higher Rates for Interpreters.......................................... 21
Vendor Management and Measurement.................................................................. 23
  Quality Measurement Remains a Complicated Affair.............................................. 23
    Anticipate the Growth in the Measurement of Interpreting Quality....................... 23
    Quality Evaluations Revolve around a Variety of Factors....................................... 23
    “Good Vendor” Status Stems from More than Quality Interpreting....................... 25
    Poor Quality and Bad Customer Service Are Deal Breakers................................ 26
Implications.............................................................................................................. 27
Related Research..................................................................................................... 28
  About Common Sense Advisory.............................................................................. 29
  Future Research..................................................................................................... 29
  Applied Research and Advisory Services.............................................................. 29

# Figures

Figure 1: Demographics of Respondents to Our Buy-Side Survey.............................. 4
Figure 2: The Future of the Demand for Interpretation Services............................... 9
Figure 3: Interpreting Procurement Models............................................................... 14
Figure 4: Tendency to Source Translation and Interpreting from the Same Vendors........ 16
Figure 5: Methods Used to Find Interpreting Agencies.............................................. 17
Figure 6: Buyer Requirements for Selecting Interpreting Suppliers........................... 18
Figure 7: Preference for Formal Training of Freelance Interpreters .................................. 19
Figure 8: Value of Certifications by National Organizations ........................................... 22
Figure 9: Measurement of the Quality of Interpreting Services ..................................... 24
Figure 10: Criteria Used to Evaluate Quality in Interpretation ...................................... 24
Figure 11: Elements That Create Successful Relationships ......................................... 25
Figure 12: Factors That Can End a Relationship .............................................................. 26

Tables

Table 1: The Four Types of Interpreting Tracked by CSA Research ................................. 6
Table 2: Top Interpreting Language Combinations ......................................................... 8
Table 3: 2014 Interpreting Investment by Spend Brackets ............................................. 11
Table 4: Average Spend on Interpreting in 2014 ............................................................. 12
Table 5: Numbers of Interpreting Resources Used ......................................................... 14
Table 6: Source of Interpreting Services ........................................................................ 15
Language access policies and advances in technology have drastically changed the interpreting landscape. Spoken language services increasingly touch the general public in everyday situations. To assess the state of this fast-growing segment of the language services market, CSA Research conducted a survey of 197 buyers of interpreting services from 25 countries. This report focuses on four issues: the demand for interpretation, vendor sourcing practices, interpreter qualification requirements, and vendor management and measurement. Read the companion research for more details on on-site, conference, over-the-phone, and video interpreting.

Interpretation service providers can use this data to better understand buyer demand, decide on their interpretation focus, and refine their service offerings. For languages service providers that are new to interpreting services, this research will help them determine whether that market segment makes business sense for them. In this report, we cover:

- **Respondent Profile.** We provide details on the profile of survey respondents.

- **The Demand for Interpretation.** We present survey results on languages requested, past and future changes in the demand, and spend data.

- **Vendor Sourcing Practices.** We cover data from buyers on procurement and supply chain models as well as methods to find and evaluate vendors.

- **Interpreter Qualifications.** We outline buyers’ preferences in terms of interpreter training and certifications.

- **Vendor Management and Measurement.** We review survey results tied to quality measurement practices, traits needed in vendors, and motives that cause buyers to terminate relationships.

- **Implications.** We summarize what providers should do with this information based on the state of the interpreting market.

- **Related Research.** We recommend other CSA Research reports and briefs that provide additional data and analysis about interpreting.
Related Research

CSA Research has been writing about interpreting since 2008. Throughout this document, we referenced earlier research that explains or expands on issues being discussed. We recommend the following reports and briefs:

- “The Interpreting Marketplace” (Jun10) – This report describes results from a survey of buyers, LSPs, and interpreters. It provides broad information relating to languages and demographics of interpreters in North America, compensation, supplier views on education and training, and buy-side data such as major verticals that generate the demand for interpreting.

- “The Top 10 Telephone Interpreting Companies: 2014” (Jul14) and “The Top 20 On-Site Interpreting Companies: 2014” (Jul14) – These briefs list the leading suppliers of OPI and on-site interpreting services.

- “Trends in “Over-the-Phone Interpreting” (Jan15), “Trends in Video Remote Interpreting” (Jan15), “Trends in On-Site Interpreting” (Jan15), and “Trends in Conference Interpreting” (Jan15) – These four data briefs are based on the same buy-side survey as this report and provide more in-depth information about OPI, VRI, on-site, and conference interpreting.
About Common Sense Advisory

Common Sense Advisory, Inc. is an independent research firm committed to objective research and analysis of the business practices, services, and technology for translation, localization, and interpreting. With its research for both Global Leaders and Industry Providers, Common Sense Advisory endeavors to improve the quality and practice of international business, and the efficiency of the online and offline operations that support it. To find out more about our research and how to become a member:

- E-mail us info@commonsenseadvisory.com.
- Call +1.978.275.0500.

Future Research

Common Sense Advisory seeks interviewees from the community of people involved in building business applications for international use. If you would like to be interviewed or have clients who would like to share their experiences, please e-mail us at info@commonsenseadvisory.com. We anonymize participants and hold all information in the strictest confidence.

Applied Research and Advisory Services

This report and other Common Sense Advisory research into the best practices of business globalization serve as the foundation for our Applied Research and Advisory Services including International Customer Experience Assessments, Vendor Selection, Localization Business Process Audits, Globalization Excellence and Optimization Assessments, and Globalization Roadmaps. E-mail us at info@commonsenseadvisory.com for more information.