THE REMOTE INTERPRETATION INDUSTRY

STANDARDS AND BEST PRACTICES

cyracom INTERNATIONAL, INC.

CHOOSING A REMOTE INTERPRETATION PROVIDER CAN BE DAUNTING.

Purchasers need to understand basic industry standards that professional interpretation companies follow in order to make an educated purchasing decision. These range from reviewing interpreter qualifications to using the latest technology to achieve efficient, accurate, and secure interpretations—both over the phone and via video:

OVER-THE-PHONE INTERPRETATION (OPI)

Phone interpretation is a three-way call between a non-English-speaking patient, an English-speaking provider, and a bilingual interpreter. The service is often available in hundreds of languages.

Provider and patient can be in the same room together using two phones or a dual-handset telephone; or, the provider can dial out to the interpretation service to call the patient at home.

VIDEO REMOTE INTERPRETATION (VRI)

Video Remote Interpretation relies on a videophone, web camera, or other video technology so patients and providers can both see and hear an interpreter.

Typically VRI providers offer a more limited number of languages compared to what is available for OPI. Some providers will claim to be capable of servicing an extensive number of VRI languages, with a system prepared to rollover to OPI when a video interpreter is not actually available.

This white paper examines the practices and features of remote interpretation industry standards. The reader should walk away equipped to understand various interpretation providers' offerings, and be able to assess whether they exceed industry standards or where they may be lacking.

STANDARD: FAIR AND TRANSPARENT PRICING AND OFFERINGS

Some interpretation providers may overpromise on what they can actually deliver, especially if they are a small company trying to compete with major players in the industry. This may include an unrealistic combination of low prices, free high-quality equipment, the amount of languages they offer, and/or high-quality interpretation. The reality is that these promises are either not delivered as expected or the provider may cut corners for quality elsewhere.

WHERE QUALITY SHORTCUTS MAY BE TAKEN:	HOW THESE SHORTCUTS MAY AFFECT CLIENTS:
A lack of investment in infrastructure, technology, and interpreter hiring/ training/monitoring	May lead to long wait times, dropped calls, and poor quality interpretation
Overreliance on overseas interpreters and infrastructure	May limit reliability, cultural competency, and security
"Free" equipment, which may be heavily subsidized through service costs, hidden fees, and a poor design	May "cost" more later, with time spent dealing with poor quality equipment, learning walkarounds for an unintuitive or ineffective setup, and repair process
Higher per-minute prices and monthly utilization requirements for phone and video interpretation	May pay more for services in the long run

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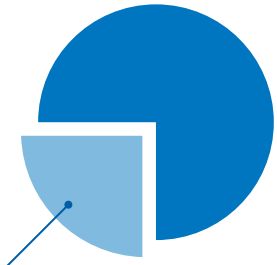

An average of 25% of interpretation provider sales are to other language services providers.

Bids from providers should include a straightforward, per-minute price for services, as well as equipment options and any additional services needed to access the services. These may include software, toll-free numbers, a dedicated account manager, client services representatives or operators, implementation support, support materials, and reporting. If the provider does not make it clear that those are included in their quote, you may be charged separately for each of these features and services.

PROVISION OF SERVICES THROUGH THEIR OWN INTERPRETERS, RATHER THAN AN OVERRELIANCE ON RESELLING.

The Language Services Industry 2018 Market by Common Sense Advisory (CSA) explains that some interpretation providers resell services from smaller language service providers, marking up prices in the process.

CSA found that an average of 25% of their respondents' sales were to other language services providers. These smaller companies may not have the same standards of hiring, training, and quality monitoring that the larger reseller promised.

RED FLAGS

- Promises that seem too good to be true, especially from a small and/or young provider
- A bid that does not include equipment, software, reporting capabilities, implementation support, or an account manager
- An interpretation "provider" that is actually a well-marketed middle man, marking up and reselling services from other providers

STANDARD: INTERPRETER QUALIFICATIONS AND VETTING

Purchasers should ask what kind of in-depth vetting process the providers follow to ensure they are hiring quality interpreters. This may include:

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TESTING FOR POTENTIAL INTERPRETERS

Are interpreters required to pass a language assessment before beginning work with the provider? What topics does the interpretation provider test on? Is the provider specific or vague when sharing this information?

SOUND QUALITY AND SECURITY FOR INTERPRETER CALLS

Who is answering the majority of your calls? Are they employees with supervisors who monitor their calls for quality? Where are they located? Do they have access to a reliable phone line and a quiet, secure workspace?

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COMPREHENSIVE INTERPRETER TRAINING

According to the *2018 Language Services Market*, nearly 60% of language service providers have only 2 to 5 full-time employees. 85% of global language service providers have 20 or fewer employees, and less than 3% employ more than 100.

Most companies primarily rely on independent contractor interpreters. Even though currently in the US, interpretation providers cannot lawfully train independent contractors.

As a result, interpretation providers with operations in the US must employ interpreters in order to train and qualify them. Other options for training or certification do exist–such as language institutions, colleges, and for-profit interpreting training agencies–but the length, difficulty level, and subjects taught are not universally standardized.

A WORD ON INTERPRETER CERTIFICATION

Tremendous progress has been made over the last two decades to develop a national medical interpretation certification. Two organizations have released their own separate medical interpretation certifications: The National Board of Certification of Medical Interpreters (NBCMI) first released its national certification in December 2009, and the Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI) launched its certification program in early 2011. NBCMI and CCHI currently offer certification for seven languages between the two of them, with more likely becoming available in the future.

Some providers may claim that while they do not train their independent contractor interpreters, that they will only use nationally certified interpreters to take calls. If your language needs exceed the seven languages currently offered for national certification, then providers need to explain what else they do to vet their interpreters for quality.

BACKGROUND CHECKS TO CONFIRM INTERPRETER TRUSTWORTHINESS

Whenever permissible, providers should conduct background checks on prospective interpreters to ensure they can reliably be trusted with confidential information while interpreting.

RED FLAGS

- The interpretation provider lacks a standard procedure for vetting interpreters or is vague about interpreter qualifications
- The provider does not require or provide training
- The provider does not run background checks on interpreters, even where permitted

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STANDARD:
DATA SECURITY AND INTERPRETER QUALITY MONITORING

Interpreting very frequently includes hearing and conveying private patient information—medical conditions, social security numbers, payment information, etc.—so data security is crucial.

SECURE INTERPRETER WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Many interpretation providers claim to run contact centers without defining the term. Some list small storefront offices with less than 10 people or even home offices as "contact centers," although they lack the workforce and secure infrastructure that the classification implies.

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REGULAR QUALITY MONITORING THAT DOES NOT COMPROMISE CLIENT DATA

Quality monitoring helps to confirm that interpreters are adhering to their training and other policies, protocols, and best practices.

In order to protect privacy and confidentiality, an interpretation provider should conduct real-time call monitoring and coaching for interpreters without recording calls.

RED FLAGS

- The interpretation provider does not have the infrastructure in place to keep call information secure
- The interpretation provider does not have a process in place to verify interpretation accuracy and adherence to best practices

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STANDARD: INTERPRETER CONNECTION PROCESS AND BILLING

EFFICIENT USE OF AUTO-AUTHENTICATION AND INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE FOR QUICK CONNECTIONS

Communications technology available to interpretation providers today includes auto-authentication for account numbers and PINs and interactive voice response (IVR) for choosing a language. If clients prefer to use this technology, it can shave seconds or even minutes off each call.

If interpretation providers do not offer this technology, they should be transparent that their Average Speed of Answer quotes may not include the time it takes to connect to or speak to an operator.

TRANSPARENT, SEPARATE BILLING FOR INTERPRETERS AND OTHER OPERATORS

If providers charge for time spent with an operator or a client services representative, it should be very apparent to clients when they review their invoices which per-minute charges are being applied to the interpretation session versus support time with another agent.

RED FLAGS

- The interpretation provider excludes wait times spent in double queuing—first for the operator, then for the interpreter—in their Average-Speed-of-Answer claims
- The interpretation provider charges the same rate for speaking to an operator as to the interpreter.

STANDARD: OPERATIONAL TRANSPARENCY

PHYSICAL OPERATIONS FOR SECURITY AND EMPLOYEE INTERPRETER CLAIMS

Some interpretation providers may claim to run contact centers but define the term loosely or are unclear about the number of offices they have. Do they provide publicly available information about these physical locations – addresses, number of employees, square footage, and photographs? Providers should be open to sharing information about their locations and should be willing to let clients and prospects tour those locations.

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...your remote interpretation provider should be able to provide access, at no additional cost, to a variety of support staff while you are using their interpretation services.

DATA OPERATIONS FOR USAGE AND BILLING CONFIRMATION

Interpretation providers should have the technology to provide near-real-time interpretation utilization data and clear billing statements online. This provides clients a platform to track usage between different departments, staff members to create their own reports, and the ability to compare usage.

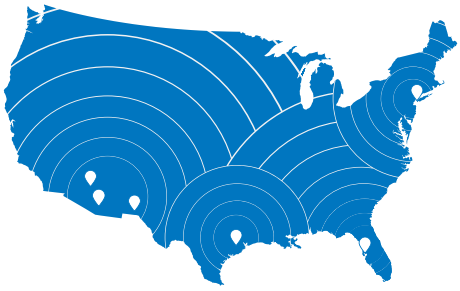
STAFF OPERATIONS FOR SUPPORT AND OPTIMIZATION

As a purchaser, your remote interpretation provider should be able to provide access, at no additional cost, to a variety of support staff while you are using their interpretation services:

- Dedicated account managers for optimizing utilization and answering client questions
- Client services for troubleshooting or real-time feedback
- Implementation specialists for setting up the service

RED FLAGS

- The interpretation provider does not share information publicly about their physical locations
- The interpretation provider does not provide an online platform to track usage, create reports, or view billing statements for accuracy
- The interpretation provider does not provide access to knowledgeable staff as part of their service offerings



DO YOU HAVE MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LANGUAGE SERVICES INDUSTRY?

Reach out to our language services consultants today at getstarted@cyracom.com.

About CyraCom

In business for 25 years, CyraCom is a language services leader that provides interpretation and translation services to thousands of organizations across the US and worldwide.

Providing the best language services is a complex formula, and CyraCom considers every piece of the equation: quality, availability, security, speed and accessibility, and client support.

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