Keeping up with the growing German market

AIIC Germany presents the results of research into the regional market: some good news, bad news, surprising news, and some lessons for the future.

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Following the example of our colleagues in France, the German Region of AIIC decided to conduct a market survey for interpretation services in 2017 in order to try and shed some light on issues highly relevant to the interpreting community.

Together with the German Association of Conference Interpreters (V KD) and with financial support from AIIC international, AIIC Germany commissioned a market research agency to conduct telephone interviews with members of our (potential) target groups.

In a total of 149 interviews, direct customers (e.g. companies, public institutions, NGOs), event agencies, interpreting agencies and technical equipment providers were asked about their needs and perspectives.

The aim was to find out more about who our customers actually are, how they make their decisions when procuring interpreting services and where the (German) market is headed in general.

Some of the results were quite surprising; others confirmed what many colleagues had experienced themselves over the years.

First the good news…

From an interpreter’s perspective, the results of the 2017 market study are both positive and negative.

Let’s start with the good news: Our market seems to be very stable or, in many segments, even growing! And even though English is often considered the new lingua franca in Germany, the strongest demand for interpreting services is still for English, followed by French, Spanish and Chinese.

Simultaneous interpreting from the booth is still the predominant mode of interpreting, even though bidule interpreting is also quite common.

Many customers, especially those with smaller event volumes per year, prefer to book interpreters directly instead of through translation agencies.

This customer group also attaches more value to membership in a professional association although – and this is part of the bad news – very few clients are actually aware of any professional associations in the field.
Market development - Trends

What do you think, have your interpreting requirements decreased, increased or remained the same in the last 3 years?

- direct customers: 16% decreased, 58% stayed the same, 25% increased
- event agencies: 8% decreased, 83% stayed the same, 9% increased
- large interpreting agencies: 11% decreased, 33% stayed the same, 60% increased
- small interpreting agencies: 25% decreased, 63% stayed the same, 13% increased
- equipment providers: 7% decreased, 64% stayed the same, 29% increased

Base: Gesamt (n=147) (Direktkunden (n=95), Dolmetscherhandlungen gross (n=18), Dolmetscherhandlungen klein (n=8), Eventagenturen (n=12), Technikanbieter (n=14))

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Then the bad news…

As it turned out during the interviews, only 20% of end customers and a shocking 8% of event agencies had ever heard of AIIC (results were very similar for VKD).

Roughly half of all clients interviewed did not know whether their current interpreters were members of any professional associations but, when prompted, many of them indicated that membership would be perceived as a guarantee for professionalism and quality of the service provided.
Growth in agencies

Since translation and interpreting agencies seem to be more and more present on the German market, some questions in our market study focused on interpreting volumes assigned to these agencies and on how they do in terms of satisfaction, pricing etc. when compared to individual freelance or consultant interpreters.

The results were sobering and encouraging at the same time: the biggest growth on the market was indeed registered by interpreting agencies. Clients with higher event volumes indicated a tendency to use agencies for convenience reasons since most agencies provide one-stop solutions (including multiple languages, interpreting equipment, etc.).

Since end-customers and event agencies are faced with a large variety of interpreting service providers with a wide price range, AIIC members need to be clearly positioned within this field. Seeking direct customer contact, advertising AIIC membership and specialty qualifications could be key to this strategy.

Surprises

Other surprises included the fact that clients indicated they would like to see more detail in the quotes they receive from interpreters in order to facilitate their decision-making process.

The time needed to prepare for an interpreting assignment for instance was one of the items mentioned that could be listed separately from the actual interpreter’s fee when issuing a quote for an interpreting job.

It also turned out that booking decisions in most companies and organizations are not taken by one single person but rather by a group of people, often above the interpreter’s initial point of contact with a potential client.

Many interviewees also indicated that when looking for interpreters for multilingual events, they were mainly looking for specialists focusing in their respective industry or field.
Additional services offered or one-stop-shop solutions were another selling point for clients when trying to find interpreters online.

**Conclusions**

So what are the conclusions we can draw from the German market research?

Well, first of all the satisfaction scores for directly booked interpreters (and especially AIIC interpreters) were very high among all groups of clients interviewed.

But while that’s great news and we can certainly build on that, there still seems to be a lot of untapped potential: if clients are satisfied with AIIC interpreters, we should proudly advertise the fact that we’re members of this association!

For instance by making abundant use of our logo, but also by simply mentioning AIIC when talking to our customers.

We also need to make sure that our professional association and its significance as a quality label become more well-known among existing and potential clients by exploring new communication strategies on an association level.

Both as individual interpreters and as AIIC, we need to make sure that clients can find us on the internet; that they know which fields we specialize in and what services we offer.

The study shows that the German market is still growing; we just need to keep up with it!
Next up: results of the online survey of interpreters

In addition to the customer survey, AIIC Germany and VKD also conducted an online survey among conference interpreters working on the German market.

Thanks to a high participation rate, the results can be considered representative for our market and offer a detailed picture of our conference interpreter landscape.

A more in-depth report on how interpreters in Germany perceive their market and their professional situations will follow soon.

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