

# GET FIT FOR THE FUTURE OF TRANS CREATION

A handbook on how to  
succeed in an undervalued market

**NINA SATTLER-HOVDAR**

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***Great content is clear but stimulating, interesting  
but accessible, useful but enjoyable. It moves us.  
It makes us think and act differently.  
And the world certainly needs more of that.***

— Adam Stone, *pulse*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [www.linkedin.com/pulse/seven-deadly-sins-business-writing-adam-stones](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/seven-deadly-sins-business-writing-adam-stones) (last accessed 8 May 2018)

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## FOREWORD

Transcreation has become a much-discussed topic in the language services business lately. Compared to issues like neural machine translation (NMT), where translations are generated by software and intricate algorithms, and massive growth in certain sectors like the dubbing business<sup>2</sup>, transcreation is a niche segment. Nevertheless, it is of great interest for professionals with the right skills who wish to set themselves apart from the mass translation market.

But what is transcreation, really? Is it just a buzzword for premium-quality translations or a synonym for “creative translations,”<sup>3</sup> as many seem to think? Or is there more to it?

This book deals in depth with these questions, giving you a definition and plenty more. It contains the essence of more than 25 years of hands-on experience in the fields of translation, marketing, advertising, and transcreation. My focus throughout this book has been on providing practical, actionable insights, and I have endeavored to cover all the questions that colleagues and clients typically ask me.

Why did I decide to write this book? After years of giving talks on the topic, starting in 2006 at the American Translators Association’s annual conference in New Orleans, the German Federation of Translators and Interpreters (Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer, BDÜ) asked me to write a book on the subject.

It took some time to write, but was eventually published in 2016 under the title *Vom Übersetzen zum Übertexten* (literally: *From Translation to Trans-*

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2 See for instance: <https://slator.com/demand-drivers/talent-crunch-hits-media-localization-as-amazon-netflix-accelerate-market-growth/> (last accessed 26 April 2019)

3 Other terms used in the market include: adaptive translation, in-market copyediting, cross-market adaptation, marketing rewriting, cultural adaptation, in-language copywriting, cross-market copywriting, “translations that sing,” “translations that sound like they have been written by copywriters,” and others.

creation). To date, it is the only book on the market that deals specifically and exclusively with the subject of transcreation in a business context.

I was overwhelmed by how well it was received by colleagues and companies alike. The feedback I keep getting underscores the need to deal in depth with what transcreation really is, how it differs from other services that language professionals offer, and how to address the main problems that most of them grapple with. Since my first book on transcreation was published in German, thereby limiting its readership to the German-speaking market, I felt it was time to come up with a book on the subject in English.

This book is the result.

I hope you will find it helpful. If you feel that something is missing, or if you would like to tell me about an experience you had in delivering or buying transcreation services, I'd love to hear from you. Get in touch at: [awesome@sattler-hovdar.com](mailto:awesome@sattler-hovdar.com)

**Note:** This book may alter your understanding of the language services business as you know it. Your experience may differ from mine, and you may disagree with some of my views. However, everything in this book is based on decades of experience in the business and on countless talks, e-mail exchanges, coaching sessions, and conversations with clients and colleagues around the world.

The focus of this book is to provide hands-on, actionable advice on how to build and manage a successful transcreation business. It does not address transcreations for specific language pairs in particular. Instead, all examples are given in a way to ensure equal relevance for readers around the globe, no matter where they reside or what language pairs they work with.

## WARM-UP: SOME REAL-LIFE STORIES

I am a fan of insights and advice based on real-life experience. This is what participants in my workshops — and the readers of my German book — appreciate most, so I will take the same approach here:

***“I am no longer afraid to charge a more commensurate rate.”***

At a recent event, a former participant in one of my workshops came up to me and we started chatting. I asked her how her transcreation business was going. She had enrolled in a six-month distance learning copywriting course after attending one of my workshops, where I had recommended copywriting courses for further honing transcreative skills. Looking back, she wholeheartedly recommended such courses, especially because of the boost in confidence she gained: confidence in her skills and, with that, the confidence to charge a price more commensurate with her expertise and hard work.

This feedback was very gratifying. I had helped someone find the confidence to pursue this business further, deepen her expertise, and charge what she was really worth. With my work, and this book, I want to help more colleagues achieve that confidence.

***“He is such a reliable translator of our technical documentation, he knows our products really well, so we thought he would be a good fit for our marketing material too. But sadly, the result was not up to par.”***

This is a classic. Companies that call on me for help often tell me they get translations that are stilted, unnatural, clumsy, awkward, sound translated, lack the right feel, sound as if the translator didn't really care, etc.

In this case, the company had taken high-gloss sales material and had asked, and paid, their regular translation provider for a translation. And so, not surprisingly, they ended up with a translation. Their French subsidiary told them what it thought of it, in unmistakable French.

What had happened? Why were the French so upset? Was the translation poorly done?

No, it wasn't. As a translation it wasn't poorly done. It was accurate in terms of technical terminology, it was complete, nothing had been overlooked, misunderstood or omitted, and the grammar and spelling were flawless. It had passed all the quality checks that a translation needs to pass. But it lacked that punch. It didn't fly. It just wasn't right. The French called it clumsy, taxing to read, and not at all persuasive. It was complete and grammatically correct, but wouldn't help the sales people sell.

The problem wasn't the translation as such. The problem was that the client had requested a translation but had expected something that a copywriter might have written. In short: They had expected a *transcreation*.

"All right," you say, "so why didn't they ask for a transcreation, if a transcreation was what they needed?" Why indeed? The people at this company — like most people — hadn't ever heard of transcreation. They were unaware that sales and promotional material can't just be translated the same way that their technical manuals or legal documents were translated. They didn't know that their high-gloss marketing material needed to be handled differently.

And why should they be expected to know? They weren't experts in languages. They were experts in producing heavy-duty industrial equipment. The client wasn't even the problem. The problem was the reliable technical translator colleague who either didn't know, or hadn't explained it to the client, or maybe knew, but wasn't able to come up with a transcreation. Translators without proper transcreation training won't generally be able to.

Or maybe the problem was the project manager at the language service company the client had retained — project managers, though they are supposed to be the client-advisory experts, are often unaware of the need for transcreative work and hence fail to enlighten their end client.

The takeaway of the story?

*If you request a translation, and pay for a translation, you get a translation.*

If what you actually need is a transcreation, read this book. It will tell you everything you need to know to deliver transcreations that will delight the client.

***“I sent my client that article you wrote and it worked like a charm. No more haggling about prices!”***

Many years ago, an excited colleague got in touch to thank me for an article<sup>4</sup> I had written titled “Translators hired as copywriters,” which, back then, was my phrase for what has since become better known as transcreation. She had a client who was very happy with her transcreative work, but didn’t understand why it cost so much more than what that company normally paid for translations. She sent her client my article and the client understood. A longstanding business relationship was set to continue for many more years to come.

***“Recently, a new client asked me to translate some marketing material. I recommended they use my transcreation service instead. I would never have had the courage to do so before your workshop!”***

It is interesting to see how many clients open up to transcreation once we explain the concept to them. The problem with most clients is not that they categorically reject transcreation as such, but that they are unfamiliar with it. Would you buy something that you’ve never heard of, or have only a vague notion of? Probably not. If you want to build a successful transcreation business, being able to explain to clients what transcreation is and how they would benefit from that service is paramount. This is what this book is going to help you with.

***“I feel much more confident about my abilities.”***

This is the feedback I most like to hear from my workshop participants and readers of my book. I love to hear that I have helped others find the confidence in what they offer their clients with a series of pointers to get them on track.

That is what I want to help you with, if you are a provider of transcreation services. I want you to gain more confidence in your abilities.

Even if you think you are pretty confident already, you may be unhappy, because you feel unable to charge a price in line with the hard work that

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4 Published in the ATA Chronicle, Volume XXXVI, February 2007.

goes into transcreation. Indeed, one of the most pressing concerns that I hear from colleagues is: “How can I convince clients that this kind of work is different from regular translations?”

If your client doesn't pay for the added value you are bringing them, it is not because they don't trust you; it is because they don't understand what the difference is. In the client's mind, it is all a translation, right?

It is up to you — the expert — to show and tell, and explain, maybe at length, over and over again. And to do that, you must be clear yourself about what transcreation really is, how it is different from translation, and why. Few clients, colleagues, and language service companies really know the difference, as of now. I want this to change. I hope this book can contribute to that.

## THE NEED FOR SHOW-AND-TELL

To illustrate the need to clearly differentiate between the various types of services a linguist can provide, let us have a look at a couple of text examples. For each example I will provide a summary of the type of text, its purpose, the number of words in the text, and how much time an experienced linguist would need, on average, to come up with an adequate target-language version.

### Example 1

*For purposes of this Agreement, “Confidential Information” means any data or information that is proprietary to the Disclosing Party and not generally known to the public, whether in tangible or intangible form, in whatever medium provided, whether unmodified or modified by Receiving Party or its Representatives (as defined herein), whenever and however disclosed, including, but not limited to: (i) any marketing strategies, plans, financial information, or projections, operations, sales estimates, business plans and performance results relating to the past, present or future business activities of such party, its affiliates, subsidiaries and affiliated companies; (ii) plans for products or services, and customer or supplier lists; (iii) any scientific or technical information, invention, design, process, procedure, formula, improvement, technology or method; (iv) any concepts, reports, data, know-how, works-in-progress, designs, development tools, specifications, computer software, source code, object code, flow charts, databases, inventions, information and trade secrets; (v) any other information that should reasonably be recognized as confidential information of the Disclosing Party; and (vi) any information generated by the Receiving Party or by its Representatives that contains, reflects, or is derived from any of the foregoing.*

Text category:	Legal translation
Purpose of text:	Inform parties to the agreement about definitions used in the document

Number of words: 184  
Average time needed: 20 minutes  
Number of words per hour: 552

Example 1 is a typical passage from a standard agreement.<sup>5</sup> Convolved as it may seem, experienced legal translators will be able to provide an accurate translation within no more than twenty minutes, especially if we realistically assume some translation memory leverage. The hourly output based on this number of words would then be 552 words. In other words, an experienced legal translator can expect to translate around 550 words per hours of this kind of text. An average output between 400 and 600 words per hour for in-domain translations<sup>6</sup> is realistic.

## Example 2

### ***Name that Newsletter***

*Starting next year, all our employees will receive a new e-newsletter that will serve as a tool for information sharing about the transition to our new positioning. We'd like you to help us find a name for that newsletter and are running a contest starting now through noon EST Dec. 18.*

*There are prizes for the winning entries, but first let me explain what the newsletter is for. As envisioned by the Employee Communications Team working on the rebranding, and fully supported by me, the newsletter will help us keep a sharp focus on the reasons for our rebranding efforts and provide regular updates on our progress. Remember, when we become ACME, we fully expect to accelerate global customer recognition of the best attributes of all of the brands we have now, making it easier to do business with us.*

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5 Source: <http://www.hbs.edu/newventurecompetition/Documents/Nondisclosure%20Agreement.docx> (last accessed on 8 June 2019)

6 In-domain translations refers to translations done by professional translators who specialize in the field that the text relates to (for example: court document translations done by legal translators, medical report translations done by medical translators, fund prospectus translations done by financial translators etc.)

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Nina Sattler-Hovdar is a translator and transcreator working from English and Norwegian into German. Her expertise lies in transcreating marketing, advertising, public relations and other business-critical texts that require top translation and copywriting skills.

Based on her experience in translation and marketing around the world, Nina has become a well-known transcreator and sought-after speaker offering presentations, seminars, workshops, and webinars for international translators' associations, language service companies and direct clients in various industries. She also works as a consultant and coach for freelance translators aspiring to gain a better position in the market and for companies looking to improve their interaction with language providers in marketing communications.

Her highly praised German book on transcreation, *Translation-Transkreation – Vom Über-Setzen zum Über-Texten*, was published by the German Federal Association of Interpreters and Translators (BDÜ) in 2016 and is so far the only book on the market that deals specifically with the subject of transcreation in a business context. *Get Fit For The Future Of Transcreation* is an English sequel to that book, with many additions, including checklists, workflows, and a bonus chapter answering more than 60 frequently asked questions.