

Volume 6, No. 4
October 2002



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Trados—Is It a Must?

by Andrei Gerasimov

The aggressive marketing campaign of Trados makes us to believe that you can't be/stay successful/competitive on the worldwide translation service market unless you have/use this "industry standard" TM software. The objective of this micro-study is to check whether the above statement is true and, if so, to what extent. I believe that my case is quite representative, since I am a typical freelance technical/marketing translator translating about 500 thousand words from English into Russian per year. My clients (businesses and translation companies) are from all over the world—USA, Israel, Japan, Belgium, UK, France, Russia etc. These facts make my own case study typical enough for drawing valid conclusions regarding the truthfulness of the above-mentioned marketing campaign.

I was quite happy with Wordfast for a year when a lost job (use of Trados was a strict client's requirement) made me buy Trados 5.0. It was in January 2002. It took me two weeks (full-time) to learn how to use the tool (despite the fact that I was thoroughly familiar with the TM concept and had used DéjàVu and Wordfast). By the end of the first month I was proficient enough in the use of Trados to translate various types of files. After that I sent notification that I owned/used Trados 5.0 Freelancer to about 2000 (two thousand) translation agencies worldwide, including my old clients.

By the end of the second month I returned to Wordfast in my daily work for several reasons. Some of them are as follows: IMHO, WF is much more user-friendly. My OS and applications (Windows 98, MS Office 97) never crash when I use WF. The last reason was purely psychological one: I did not feel obligated to migrate to Trados from WF only because I paid USD 745 for Trados and WF was licensed free of charge.

From January 2002 to August 2002 I did 125 small, medium-sized, and large jobs. Only three jobs required the use of Trados. In these 3 cases the source files were in MS Word format. The total word count of these 3 jobs

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was less than 3 percent of my total workload. I did these 3 jobs using WF 3.35, and no client noticed any difference. They were sure that I had used Trados 5.0 and were happy about my translation services.

Of course my experience with various TM software is a limited one. However my conclusions are as follows:

1. The use of TM software is a must for every freelance translator working on domestic or worldwide markets. TM software increased my output/productivity 30 percent on the average, in some cases 70 percent.
2. Theoretically buying Trados should help to win a higher segment of the worldwide translation market, since only six Russian freelancers have it. However actually the business advantages of buying Trados were negligible in my case.
3. The main conclusion—you can advertise yourself as a Trados user even if actually you use Wordfast. Wordfast is completely compatible with Trados files (bilingual and TMs). No client sees a difference. The difference is significant only to your wallet—Trados is licensed for about USD 700, and Wordfast for free.
4. Keep your head cool when you are attacked by overly aggressive marketing experts.

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