



GETTING STARTED IN LITERARY TRANSLATION

The Literary Translator and the Internet



DEDICATED TO THE
SERVICE OF LITERARY
TRANSLATION
AND TRANSLATORS

ALTA GUIDE TO LITERARY TRANSLATION
The Literary Translator and the Internet

The Literary Translator's Online Presence

How To Build Your Web Presence

Beyond Websites: Social Networks

Online Publishing: Internet Journals

Electronic Publishing

ALTA GUIDE TO LITERARY TRANSLATION: THE LITERARY TRANSLATOR AND THE INTERNET

For literary translators, the Internet is a rich source of information and opportunities and plays an invaluable role in creating professional networks and distributing information. At the same time, this wealth of information can be a source of seemingly intractable problems, ranging from issues concerning a translator's professional image to copyright infringement.

An increasing array of professional news sources and networking and employment opportunities are now available to translators online. Additionally, the Internet has become an important space in which translators can develop and promote their professional image. By taking an active stance toward the Internet, literary translators can participate directly in generating publicity and visibility for translation in general and their own work in particular.

In an ongoing effort to participate in and encourage the increasing online presence of translators and translation, this Guide will address two broad issues: the literary translator's online presence and the Internet as a new frontier in the publication and promotion of literary translation.

THE LITERARY TRANSLATOR'S ONLINE PRESENCE

In the twenty-first century, the Internet has radically altered the literary translation landscape. Literary translators now are visible not only physically (for instance, in bookstores, and at readings and conferences) but also virtually. Using an online search engine like Yahoo or Google, an editor, reader, author, professor, reviewer, or bookstore owner can find a wealth of information on individual translators and their work. The sum of information available constitutes the literary translator's "online presence."

If you have ever published a book, your name is automatically accessible through a Google Book search or a search of popular booksellers' websites, such as, amazon.com, abebooks.com, and spdpress.com (Small Press Distribution). If you have ever been interviewed in the media, won an award, or been elected to office in a professional organization, coverage of this achievement or event, including your name, has probably been posted on the web. If you have ever had a publication reviewed, that review, whether it is a rave or a pan, is almost certainly available online.

If you have never searched your name online, give it a try. What you find may delight or dismay you, but in either case, there are ways to amplify the former effect and diminish the latter. Through consistent and continued participation online, you can control to some extent what information comes up on a web search and, thus, shape what people are more likely to learn about you. Most of all, you can make sure that people see what you *want* them to see by improving the quality and the quantity of your positive exposure.

In short, the better and more extensive your online presence, the easier it is for editors, reviewers, booksellers, and colleagues to find you. One way to improve the quality of your online presence is to generate your own online content.

HOW TO BUILD YOUR WEB PRESENCE

I find the Web a necessary evil to which I have surrendered reluctantly—publishing online does not appeal at all, though I realize more people may “see” one’s work there. I wonder, though, who reads texts all the way through in that context before clicking on some link to something else in a kind of attention-deficit-disordered frenzy-of-connectivity. So I remain attached to the pleasures (and limitations) of paper. But having a website definitely has helped people to find me, if they’re looking.—Stephen Kessler

Building a website or blog is the single most effective way to build your online presence because it allows you to shape and manage your personal and professional profile. A blog is a website that features frequently updated material organized in reverse-chronological order. A common analogy for blogs is that they are like journals, though your blog can be as personal or impersonal as you choose it to be. Website and blog designs range from simple to elaborate. You can use a ready-made template or hire a professional web designer. You can host your webpage independently or set it up through a professional organization, such as PEN. You can also use a social networking site such as Facebook, ProZ, or TranslatorsCafé to create a professional presence. The content of your webpage can be limited to the bare basics or expanded to cover the full range of your professional interests and personal background.

The minimum content for a personal webpage would include

- contact information
- language pair/s and translation experience
- a list of publications, with hyperlinks to any online publications or online booksellers
- prizes, awards, and other distinctions
- your c.v. or résumé, highlighting your educational background, employment history, and professional service

Consider adding these elements as well:

- biographical statement (how you became a translator, for instance)
- current projects and available manuscripts, including samples (provide links for downloading excerpts); be sure to secure permissions for any sample
- excerpts from reviews with hyperlinks to the full text (no permission is needed for a link that simply takes the user to someone else’s site; be sure to get permission if you want to include a full copy of a review on your website)
- a blog (an online journal that presents information in reverse chronological order)

- video, audio, podcasts, and/or information on past public appearances, including interviews, readings, speeches, and conference presentations; be mindful of the need for any permissions to use copyright-protected material
- current news: readings, conferences, workshops
- relevant travel or residencies
- photos (after securing permission and including proper attribution, if necessary), these could include scans of book covers
- a headshot
- links to booksellers (or sell your own books via PayPal or Amazon Booksellers)
- a blogroll (a list of links to websites that you recommend to your readers [online dictionaries, for example])
- an e-mail subscription list or RSS feed

Perhaps, the simplest route is to take advantage of the “member page” offered by many professional organizations, such as PEN. Members can create a simple webpage using a prepared template that requires no special computer expertise. (For examples, go to <http://www.pen.org/page.php/prmID/1445/prmAlpha/65.>).

You can hire a professional web designer to create custom create and/or design a website for you. Additionally, you can use a web publishing platform like Typepad or WordPress. An example of a comprehensive and dynamic translation website is Jessica Cohen’s professional site: www.thehebrewtranslator.com (which Cohen designed by hand). For an example of a blog created on a web publishing platform, go to Adriana Jacobs’ site: www.stingykids.net (powered by Six Apart’s TypePad).

To create your own website, we recommend that you follow these steps:

1. Select and register a domain name

A domain name is the URL, or address, for your website. Many domain registration services—pairnic.com, HostMonster, and GoDaddy, for example—will register and hold your domain name for a period of time for a fee. You will need to keep track of your domain’s expiration date and renew accordingly. Once your domain name expires, it becomes available to the public. You can use almost any name for your website so long as you are not taking a name that clearly refers to another person or business. We recommend using your own name, which is easy to remember (e.g., www.stephenkessler.com, www.shirleykumove.com).

Many web publishing services (e.g., www.typepad.com, www.wordpress.com) host domain names as part of their services but usually require that your URL include the name of the publishing service. The problem is that these URLs are often not transferable. By registering your domain name through a domain registration service, you give yourself the flexibility of using that domain name with any web publishing service and ensure that you will retain your domain name for many years to come. A domain name is like a permanent address and is very important to your online presence.

2. Set up and design your website

SixApart and WordPress are currently two of the most popular personal web publishing companies. Both offer a variety of tools for getting started with web publishing and blogging. Your website can be as simple as a homepage with your contact information and links to your work online or it can be more dynamic and include pages with photographs, videos, podcasts, and a blog. The kind of web publishing tool you choose will depend on how complicated and interactive you wish to make your website.

Sometimes a publisher or an agent, if you have one, will help you build and host your professional site (e.g., <http://www.stuartbernstein.com/valenzuela.html>). You can also hire a professional web designer to create your website.

3. Update your website

Maintaining an updated website is critical. Check in every couple of weeks and make sure that the links are still viable and all the news and events current. If you include your c.v., make sure to revise it frequently. An out-of-date website reflects poorly on your professionalism. By actively updating your website, you will continue to attract readers (that is, sustain and increase your “traffic”). If your site includes a blog, try to write a post at least once a week. Regular updates create the perception of you as an active translator, particularly to the reader receiving updates by RSS feed, which is explained below. Each time you add something new, that reader is reminded of you automatically.

4. Promote your website

Just because you build a site does not mean editors, readers, and other visitors will visit it. To promote your site and attract visitors, add links on your page that take your visitors to other sites of interest (the “blogroll”). Ask other people to add your site to their blogrolls. This is a great way to build an online community and to connect with interested readers. Twitter (twitter.com), a micro-blogging platform, is quickly becoming a popular way for announcing events and readings. Facebook (facebook.com), a social networking site, also makes it very easy to send information and updates to many people at once.

Also, most current blogs and websites come with an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed built into the site. Really Simple Syndication is a popular technology for notifying users of updates to content in a website, blog, or Internet TV channel. A reader can register to receive an update when the content on your site changes. By using an RSS feed site—popular sites include Google Reader, Bloglines, and Rojo—readers can organize the sites of interest to them and check them all on one central page without wasting time checking URLs individually.

You can also increase traffic to your site by adding your URL to the online member directories of organizations you belong to and to your e-mail signature. Use it when you make comments on other websites, such as the *New York Times* Reading Room, and on other people’s blogs. Include your URL on your business card and send out an e-mail to

friends and associates announcing your new blog. Ask readers to subscribe to an e-mail list and send out a monthly e-mail highlighting changes to your site.

BEYOND WEBSITES: SOCIAL NETWORKS

Websites are not the only way to be active and present on the Internet. For example, ALTAalk is a Yahoo group through which ALTA members communicate information on upcoming events, ask questions on translation matters, and organize panels for the annual conference. Another way to participate is to leave comments on websites. At present, you can leave comments on a range of web content, from book reviews to articles to literary texts. Commenting not only increases your visibility but also contributes to making web content dynamic and active.

Facebook and MySpace are two popular social networking sites that allow users to communicate with the public or to create and manage private neighborhoods of contacts. Flickr is a photo-sharing site that is popular for documenting conferences, readings, and talks. YouTube and Vimeo are examples of video-sharing sites. These are all ways of organizing different kinds of information—photos, calendars, and video to name a few—that broaden and enhance your visibility as a literary translator and the visibility of literary translation in general.

Of course, as part of the digital native generation, I can't imagine the laboriously tactile task of translation before the age of Google. I use the intangible internet not only for general research and referencing the ever-changing, ever-growing and improving world of French online resources, but also, at some late hour of the day when brain and ear are failing me, to check my English. As for maintaining a website, my own at twinkiethekid.wordpress.com/translations still only averages, two years since I started it in my freelance career, a measly thirty hits a day. I find it more useful as a convenient and constantly available record of my achievements; in these our virus-y times, it's easier to link to it in an e-mail than attach a c.v. Other professional sites that will host a c.v./profile page for free include TranslatorsCafé and ProZ. Still, the web is a wild place, and the oddest things turn up; once I stumbled across a site providing content to readers on cell phones that had raided AGNI Online for material, including one of my pieces, without asking. I couldn't be happier if litmags were resurrected by e-reading; as in much publishing, the trade-off seems to be between visibility and revenue.—Edward Gauvin

ONLINE PUBLISHING

Internet Journals

The proliferation of online literary journals and websites has increased publishing opportunities for literary translators. Many print literary journals also have websites and post some content from their print issues online to give readers a taste of what they publish. *Drunken Boat*, *Cipher*, and *eXchanges* are examples of literary journals that exist only online. The journal *Zeek*, on the other hand, appears both in print and online. *Zeek*'s monthly online issues contain original content that is distinct from their print journal, which appears bi-annually. The world of journal publishing is distinctly fluid right now, and you will find many permutations of these models.

Translators are encouraged to seek publishing opportunities in both print and online venues, but must keep in mind that these publications are not necessarily weighed and valued identically in grant and fellowship applications or in academic job applications (not to mention tenure review). The National Endowment for the Arts grant, for instance, allows online publications to count for only a certain percentage of your publication history. This may change with time, but it is important to note these distinctions.

The main advantage of an online publication is that it exposes the literary translator's work to a large and diverse group of readers at little or no cost. In addition, promotion, which is relatively simple, requires little more than sending a link via e-mail or posting a URL on a blog or website. Be aware, though, that there are also disadvantages to this approach.

Looming large is the matter of reputation. Given the proliferation of online publication venues, translators should do their research and determine the reputation of any given publication before submitting a translation. Positive signs to look for include whether the online journal is part of a university or graduate writing program and whether it is funded by a reputable source (major humanities foundations, federal, city, and/or state programs). Also, look for reputable translators among the contributors. Submission guidelines should also be clearly stated. Although it is common for some journals to have reading fees or require subscription to the journal, be wary of any publication that does not have submission review. Pay close attention to matters of permissions for your source text and rights for your translation. Keep a copy of all agreements.

Fortunately, many print journals now accept submissions online, thereby making the task of submitting work a lot easier. Make a list of journals—both online and in print—that you are interested in and see if they have mailing lists to join. Often, submission announcements are distributed via e-mail, yet another incentive for signing up for a publication's mailing list.

Think twice before publishing anything on a blog or your personal website. Some print and online journals consider this a form of self-publishing and specifically state that they will not accept submissions that have appeared previously on blogs or personal websites. If your source text is under copyright, get permission before posting a translation online.

One overlooked advantage of publishing in an online journal is that it allows for material of non-traditional lengths and/or formats, which may not always be feasible in print publications. I once translated a novella by late Israeli playwright Hanoch Levin, but it sat unpublished for years because its length (almost 15,000 words) made it far too long for a typical literary journal, but it was too short to stand on its own as a separate publication. By chance, I was asked if I had anything to submit for a special Hebrew issue of Words Without Borders (www.wordswithoutborders.org), one of the first, and finest, online journals devoted to literary translation. Since the editors of WWB do not have to contend with printing costs and page limits, they can be fairly flexible about the length of their selections, and my translation finally found its home. (See <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/?front=DECEMBER2006>)—Jessica Cohen

ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING

The day may not be long distant when electronic book publishing will become a full-fledged avenue for the publication of literary translations. Inevitably, publishers will find viable ways to acquire, publish, and distribute books electronically. Of paramount concern, however, is the need to protect copyright, both for the original work and for the translation. Book publishers have witnessed the travails of the music and movie industries in this regard and have every reason to be concerned about the piracy of written works as well. This holds true for traditional print publishers branching out into electronic publishing as well as for new, Internet-based publishers that may or may not produce print editions of the books they publish.

At this early stage in the industry's development, what should concern the literary translator with regard to electronic publishing?

1. Know your publisher's reputation. If this is true for print publications, it is a thousand times more so for electronic ones. What authors and translators are on the house's list? Does the publisher have a professional website? How does the publisher promote publications?
2. Be sure your contract specifies everything a normal translation contract would specify and is explicit about which electronic formats the publisher is allowed to use. Are you selling the rights to a print edition as well? If so, all the stipulations about rights, royalties, and other compensation found in a traditional contract must be spelled out.
3. Keep current on the latest advances in copyright legislation, enforcement, and protection technologies. These are going to change quickly, and if you are publishing electronically, those changes will affect you. Translation rights to your source text may belong to the author or a publisher, not necessarily the source-language publisher. Authors do not always know which rights they hold. Proceed with caution.

As this guide goes to press, the publishing industry finds itself in a state of tremendous flux and there is no predicting what opportunities lie ahead. The Internet is constantly evolving, changing and adapting and new technologies constantly appear to make our presence on the Internet even more interactive and dynamic. Literary translators have an obligation to themselves and to the profession to remain informed and to contribute positively to this discussion. These are exciting times for literary translation, both offline and online. We hope that this guide has encouraged you to join in!

This guide and the others in the series *ALTA Guides to Literary Translation* can be downloaded from the ALTA website (www.literarytranslators.org, under "Publications"). Printed copies of the guides may be ordered from the ALTA office: maria.suarez@utdallas.edu.

Contact ALTA at:

American Literary Translators Association
The University of Texas at Dallas
800 West Campbell Road, JO 51
Richardson, TX 75080

Tel. 972-883-2093
Fax 972-883-6303
<http://www.literarytranslators.org>
email: maria.suarez@utdallas.edu

This brochure was produced by the ALTA Guides Committee: Adriana X. Jacobs, lead writer and editor; Marian Schwartz, advisor; and Susan Bernofsky, Edward Gauvin, Anna Guercio, Liz Henry, Rebecca McKay, and John Pluecker.