How Interpreters Are Making the Switch to Remote Interpreting in a COVID World

*P*robably the most momentous change for interpreters during the COVID-19 crisis is the universal switch to remote interpreting during the lockdown—a transition that feels threatening to some. So, I asked on Twitter whether some interpreters could share their remote interpreting experiences with us. Here are the very diverse answers I received from interpreters around the world.

LORENA ORTIZ SCHNEIDER
lorena@ortizschneider.com
www.ortizschneider.com

I did a session on FaceTime. The patient I was interpreting for was wearing personal protective equipment in the lobby of a clinic. I was at my home office with a new USB-wired headset with noise-canceling microphone and flex arm. The provider was also in the lobby, but I never saw him (maybe he was holding the phone up for the patient). The receptionist was talking in the background, which was a little distracting. It was actually not a bad session. I had to ask the patient to repeat and speak closer to the phone a few times, but overall I would give the experience an 8 on a scale of 1-10.

I did another session similar to this from my home office. The patient (wearing a facemask) was in a room at the doctor's office. The doctor was in another room in the same office without a mask. The patient was upset that she couldn't be in the same room with the doctor.

I also did a Zoom appointment, also for a medical clinic, but this time the doctor, patient, and I were all in separate places. It was a little challenging to get the doctor to look at the patient as she spoke and pointed to her body to show where she was experiencing pain and inflammation, but I made sure he looked up when I interpreted with the same gestures the patient used. This session was seamless.

At another session, a physical therapist used a platform called thera-LINK (www.thera-link.com), which worked pretty well for me but not for the patient. She was unable to connect. The therapist and I could see and hear each other on thera-LINK, but the therapist had to dial up the patient on the WhatsApp video app. The

therapist would hold up her iPhone to the screen so I could see the patient as she was talking. Nevertheless, both the audio and video were sub-par, especially for a physical therapy session where seeing people explain exercises is important, but we got through it.

Another platform I've used is call Doxyme (www.doxy.me), which is compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. However, there are latency issues on the platform itself, so we've actually ended Doxyme sessions midstream and resorted to Facebook Messenger video to complete the session. This latter platform works surprisingly well. It requires you to have a Facebook account on which you feel comfortable having the provider and limited-English-proficient individual "friend" you. (If you don't want to use your personal Facebook account to do this, set up a dummy account.)

Zoom has also worked well with law firms communicating with their clients and having them sign documents via DocuSign.

LUCÍA HERNÁNDEZ
lucia@tranvia.ca
www.tranvia.ca

When I first started hearing about events being canceled due to the coronavirus, I said a little prayer that my favorite clients (film festivals) wouldn't cancel. I'm sure you know how that turned out.

Having lost the ability to see movies in theaters, I grieved. Then I got in touch with my clients. They were also grieving, but they still had to do good by their programs. Filmmakers were depending on them to

connect with audiences and distributors. Their stories still needed to be told.

And so, while my clients worked out how they would engage with viewers and promote deal-making from home, I tried out every video conferencing, webinar, and remote interpreting platform I could to determine how to recreate an in-person encounter from home. This is not an easy feat.

I took to Twitter and found fellow interpreters doing the same. Novel solutions and issues are being discovered constantly, so I'm arming myself with knowledge and alert to hiccups. To mitigate the usual issues related to sound quality, having a clear view of the speaker and visual aids, and knowledge of the equipment, I invested in better headphones and a microphone, upgraded internet and cables, soundproofed my space as well as I could, and tested repeatedly. The added visual element required furniture rearrangement, new lighting, a camera, and an additional monitor. There's nothing like interpreting in person, but these conditions have dramatically improved my ability to interpret effectively from home.

When the time came, my clients were relieved to have one fewer thing to think about. No solution is perfect, and I'm learning something new every day. My clients still need help, but there's no time like a crisis to go from vendor to partner.

CYRIL BELANGE
contact@belangeintl.com
www.belangeintl.com

I'm a consultant conference interpreter based in Nice, France. When the COVID-19 crisis hit, I was already using some smart solutions for interpreting. I had been a project manager for the Linguali startup for two years, setting up bring-your-own-device solutions for simultaneous interpreting assignments onsite. It allowed users to listen to the interpreters through their smartphones and earpieces. I learned how to explain to clients how to use the web app, how to set up my soft console and acquire the audio

feed from the floor, and how to run the system and supervise my teams.

Consequently, during the lockdown, I quickly turned to remote simultaneous interpreting (RSI) platforms, which all have a lot in common. I tried out 10 of them and made my choice based on streaming quality and stability, confidentiality, and user experience design for both interpreters and users. I can now provide remote interpreting from my home studio or from a hub located in Nice.

Clients and users still rely on the true expertise of professional interpreters that's required to make international events a success. Let's not forget that platforms, hubs, and web apps are just tools exactly like portable interpreting equipment and booths. No more no less.

GIO LESTER
gio@giolester.com
www.GioLester.com

I started the transition to remote interpreting in 2017. It was the first time I was trained on a platform. I've also participated in training for other interpreters, demonstrations for potential clients, and actual interpreting on a volunteer basis (training for me). It was exciting!

Since then, I've become familiar with other platforms. This month I had my first job assignments: an arbitration, an interview, and the most recent was a conference with attendees from all over Latin America and speakers from the U.S. and Latin America. I had no issues other than a pain in my outer ear from the headphones. The padding on the earpieces was not enough to prevent the discomfort. Other than that, interpreting remotely has been a piece of cake!

GABRIELLA SUZANNE VANZAN
gsvanzan@fastwebnet.it
www.linkedin.com/in/gabriellasuzannevanzan

Italian conference interpreters have been severely impacted by the coronavirus crisis due to our government's ban on all conventions. In addition to citizens not being allowed to leave their homes (except out of necessity), here in Italy many so-called nonessential activities had to stop during the lockdown, leading to a sharp economic setback.

Before the crisis, the market was still dominated by traditional onsite conferences. With the crisis, conference interpreting was obliterated. Even institutions of the European Union have had to drastically reduce the amount of interpreting they offer. The pandemic has accelerated the increased use of RSI, pushing many professionals to take this path with a minimum amount of technical equipment.

Almost all European (as well as international) associations of conference interpreters have drawn up guidelines, recommendations, or position papers (mostly referring to the International Organization for Standardization's "ISO/PAS 24019—Simultaneous Interpreting Delivery Platforms—Requirements and Recommendations" regarding **interpreting delivery platforms** [IDPs]). These guidelines specify that RSI can be justified only under emergency conditions and that it still presents too many risks related to sound quality (e.g., acoustic shock**, both quantitative and qualitative**), quality and stability of the internet connection, power shortages, high cognitive load, technostress, liability (disclaimer!), as well as data protection and security (e.g., General Data Protection Regulation).

After having tested (and still testing) many IDP platforms, I've chosen to work from hubs. In my opinion (as well as for most, if not all, European conference interpreter associations), hubs are the solution that come closest to conventional onsite interpreting, allowing conference interpreters to work under safe conditions and in compliance with ISO standards and assisted by sound technicians. The number of these **hubs** is rapidly increasing in Europe. Hubs can use dedicated systems, IDP platforms, or web conferencing platforms depending on the customer's needs and preferences. Customer education is always crucial in this area.

There has been no Europe-wide survey of just conference interpreters, so there's no way to know the extent of the shift from conventional interpreting to RSI or the increase in the latter. Toward the end of this year (depending on whether there's a second wave of the virus), we'll be able to better understand the longer-term consequences of the coronavirus crisis for the Italian and European conference interpreting market.

LORETO P. ANSALDO
www.lpansaldo.net

I've worked as a community interpreter, translator, and language justice practitioner for the past four years. My focus is supporting local social justice community-based organizations and grassroots efforts. The shift to remote interpreting has been made easier by the generosity of colleagues around the world who have shared their knowledge through webinars, social media, and blog posts. Like many, I've attended countless presentations and practice sessions, for which I'm grateful. The language justice community has also come together to learn, create resources, and organize in our networks.

I primarily interpret on Zoom. Hacks are needed, but it's a financially accessible option. I added the webinar feature to my personal Pro account to play around and learn collaboratively with my interpreting partners, and I've made my account available to organizations as needed. I've also learned the basics of VoiceBoxer (thank you Seven Sisters at www.7sisterslearn.com!), but have not interpreted on there yet. An essential part of this process has been supporting community members and organizations to navigate the new technologies. This commitment requires time and intention, but it's worth it.

From my perspective as a translator, I marvel at the ingenuity of the interpreters who responded to my query and at the speed with which these changes are taking place in the world of interpreting technology. While I'm sure this change is painful to some (a change in something you love is always painful), it seems to me so much less painful than the long and protracted process that translators went through to accept technologies like translation memories and other computer-assisted translation tools. ⊙

Remember, if you have any ideas and/or suggestions regarding helpful resources or tools you would like to see featured, please e-mail Jost Zetzsche at jzetzsche@ internationalwriters.com.

Jost Zetzsche is chair of ATA's Translation and Interpreting Resources Committee. He is the author of *Translation Matters*, a collection of 81 essays about translators and translation technology. Contact: jzetzsche@ internationalwriters.com.