



I have had the pleasure of interviewing Marli Viljoen, Project Manager of Folio, a South African Interpreter Service Provider. Folio is based in Cape Town and is a member of the IMIA ISP (Interpreter Service Provider) Division. Check out Folio's website; <http://www.folio-online.co.za>. It is truly unique!

Cynthia Schenck
IMIA Board Director
ISP Division
CEO Medical Interpreters of the North Shore

1. Tell me about your business, how/why/when did it begin?

Established in 1988, the Folio Group is recognised as one of Sub-Saharan Africa's leading translation agencies. Our MD, Philip Zietsman, has academic roots as a university lecturer and from there he moved to advertising copywriting. The demand for translation into languages he could not speak himself increased, and he started Folio Translation Consultants. Currently the Folio Group consists of Folio Translation Consultants, serving local and South African clients, and Folio Online, serving international clients. Folio InterTel is our medical interpreting telephone service, and we're currently providing interpreting services to 50 health care facilities in the Western Cape province of South Africa.

2. What is your core business (primary product or service) and who is your consumer?

In addition to translations, Folio's services include interpreting, voice-overs, localisation, copywriting, editing, proofreading, transcriptions and chaperoning/guiding. Our client base comprises, inter alia, local and international corporates in the IT, telecommunications, advertising, finance, insurance, mining, tourism, health and automotive industries as well as legal firms and governmental agencies.

3. You've won an award...can you tell us more about this distinction? What do you think helped your company win this award?

Yes, Folio Online won the Cape Chamber of Commerce's Small Exporter of the Year award at the end of 2011. The company was evaluated by a panel of experts and we were interviewed extensively. As mentioned, we're one of the largest translation agencies in Sub-Saharan Africa and we provide freelance work to hundreds of translators and agencies. Furthermore we handled projects for some of the largest brands in sectors ranging from IT, Life Sciences, telecom, finance, marketing, mining, packaging and legal.

4. What is the greatest challenge Folio faces in providing consistent and competent quality service?

Working in Africa has its challenges, and training opportunities is just one of many. We only use graduates as a minimum requirement, however one is forced to make exceptions when it comes to the scarcer languages. Access to medical dictionaries is also very problematic, as well as keeping interpreters of smaller and rarer African languages updated on the latest trends and technology.

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5. How does Folio recruit Interpreters?

Only highly qualified language professionals (mother-tongue speakers) are admitted to our team. We identify individuals who have the right background from CVs sent to us on a daily basis for translation and interpreting assignments. We also conduct interviews and test their skills. New interpreters are put on a probation period, and all interpreting calls are recorded and monitored.

6. What type of training do you require of your interpreters?

There are very few, if any, training options for medical interpreters in South Africa. Post-graduate courses or short courses in general translation or interpreting can easily be found, but courses that focus specifically on medical interpreting, and medical telephone interpreting are few and far between. Currently we host workshops for potential and existing medical telephone interpreters, and distribute reading materials/latest research articles. In 2010 many of our interpreters completed an online course (www.mitio.org.za) that was adapted for the South African context. Our aim for 2012, however, is to compile a more formal training option by partnering with a local university.

7. What are the top three languages most requested?

For local medical interpreting, it's Xhosa, Sesotho and Somali. Interestingly enough, Xhosa and Sesotho are two of South Africa's official languages.

8. What technology has Folio found most effective in managing business?

The InterTel call-in system is based on a PRI platform which can accommodate up to 120 lines, therefore 60 concurrent phone calls. We customised the system and included some apps written for us to help us keep track of calls, monitor quality and create data for planning. Skype is also a handy tool for communicating with the various role players. We are currently advising our local Department of Health on making South African Sign Language (SASL) interpreters available to the deaf community by using Skype or a similar option. We also have a dedicated ftp site to share reading/study materials on medical interpreting for the interpreters.

9. What contributions has Folio made to give back to the local community?

Folio regularly donates to animal welfare, such as the WWF. We sponsor an orphaned baby elephant and rhino at the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust in Kenya, and we've recently donated wildlife equipment to the local animal welfare centre (SPCA). Social responsibility is a key theme in our office, and staff members regularly donate household items and clothes. Furthermore we sponsor school book cases to children in kindergarten. We also work with Translators Without Borders, and contribute financially to the Woordeboek of the Afrikaanse Taal (Dictionary of the Afrikaans Language).

10. How do you see your role within IMIA as an IMIA ISP member?

We're keen to form relationships with other IMIA ISP members who we can learn from and collaborate with. Folio InterTel is still in its toddler shoes and we want to develop it to a world-class service. Africa is an exciting place to be at the moment ("the last business frontier") and we want to help make our country and continent accessible to the world.