LanguageLine Solutions®

5 Critical Criteria for Selecting Your On-Demand Interpreting Partner

Evaluate Your Options and Make an Informed Decision

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Making the Right Decision

For many organizations, investing in a language access program to effectively communicate with a growing and diverse poplulation is an important decision not only to maximize their organizational goals and objectives but to appropriately serve them in the language they prefer.

This guide is intended to help make the most informed decision when choosing to partner with a language services provider (LSP) to deliver on-demand audio and video interpretation services offered over a phone or through an application.

To make this decision, buyers need to establish buying criteria relative to the services being offered, the support that accompanies that service, and the reputation of the company that provides it. Defined criteria allow for equivalent comparisons across contending providers and keen insight into their price/value equations.

In addition to establishing criteria, buyers should always establish the evidence they will accept to verify that the criteria will be met. This evidence should be as demanding and consistent as possible for each of the providers. After all, it's always a good business rule to trust, but verify.

Criteria to Evaluate the Reliability and Stability of the Language Service Provider

When selecting from competing language services providers, it is important to understand the breadth, depth, and length of experience of the companies you are considering. Understanding the company's strength will ensure the services are dependable, high-quality, and responsible. These questions will establish the criteria.

1 **What products and services do you provide?**

Not all organizations need every language service available, nor does every LSP provide all services. Best-in-class providers understand the role of each type of service, whether they offer them or not, and are able to discuss their applications with potential buyers as they build their complete language access program. The most common language services available include:

- On-demand audio and video interpreting through any phone or an application on a device
- Onsite interpreting (scheduled)
- Translation and localization
- Bilingual staff language fluency testing and interpreter training

2 **How long have you been providing audio and/or video interpretation?**

It's important to understand the length of experience with each service. LSPs with deep experience have had the opportunity to build stable processes and systems and understand how to manage a quality interpreter workforce so that you can reliably connect to a professional interpreter in seconds.

3 **How many languages are available?**

The answer to this question reveals the LSP's ability to support your organization's current and future language needs. Best in-class providers handle not only the ten most commonly requested languages, which service nearly 90 percent of the demand, but also rare languages. Can they support the languages you require?

4 **Is your service available 24/7/365 across all languages and platforms?**

Best-in-class providers staff the most commonly requested languages 24/7/365. Languages of lesser diffusion may have varying schedules.

5 **How many clients do you support? What is your overall client retention rate?**

The number of clients the LSP supports and the length of time that they maintain those relationships is a good indication of their ability to effectively meet their clients' business needs.

6 **Do you specialize in any particular industry? How many clients do you have in each industry?**

It is important to understand the expertise by industry for each LSP, given that many
industries have specialized vocabulary (i.e., medical, finance), processes, procedures, and
business requirements (i.e. laws and regulations). The LSP's experience supporting organizations like yours is critical to your success.

7 **What is your three-year interpreting revenue trend for audio and/or video?**

A revenue trend over time demonstrates success and sustainability in the marketplace.

8 **What is your average daily and annual call volume for each modality?**

The volume by calls, combined with speed to access interpreters—which will be discussed later in the guide—provides insight into the LSP's ability to scale operations to consistently meet service level demands.

9 **What is your position in the industry compared to other LSP providers?**

Common Sense Advisory, a language services provider advisory group for global market leaders, as well as two additional language services industry associations, Nimdzi and Slator, publishes research year that ranks language services providers by revenue. The ranking is an indication of business health and sustainability.

Criteria to Evaluate the Reliability and Stability of the Language Services Provider

Quality criteria for on-demand interpreting services include:

- Interpreter Quality

- Interpreter Location and Call Routing

- Speed of Delivery: Connect Time to an Interpreter

- Safety and Security of Information and Systems

Interpreter Quality

The quality and professionalism of the interpreter is perhaps the most important determinant for success. In your customer's eyes, the interpreter is representing you. The interpretation result directly affects you and your customer.

Professional, qualified interpreters conduct efficient and effective meaning-for-meaning interpretation sessions. They ensure that each session is accurate, culturally appropriate, and progresses in a timely manner. Professional interpreters are trained to manage the flow of the call effectively and have the linguistic depth to minimize the need for continuous and costly repetitions that extend session duration, thereby increasing your cost.

Many organizations rely on bilingual staff for interpreting services. There can be a vast difference in skill between a well-meaning bilingual staff member and a trained interpreter. That difference can have a tremendous impact on your business.

When establishing criteria to determine the interpreter quality for the LSPs you are considering, it is helpful to break the criteria into four sections:

- **Interpreter Recruiting:** Establish the LSP's commitment to sourcing quality candidates

- **Interpreter New Hire Training:** Understand the LSP's commitment to the quality of the interpreter training

- **Quality Assurance, Monitoring, and Ongoing Development and Support:** Understand the LSP's commitment to ongoing interpreter development and excellence

- **Procedures and Policies to Ensure Safety and Security of Information:** Understand the LSP's commitment to keeping your information, and that of your customers, safe and secure

Interpreter Recruiting

1 **Are candidates required to pass a language proficiency test?**

The purpose of this question is to determine if candidates have the required base level of language proficiency to be successful.

2 **Can you describe the content of the test(s)?**

Best-in-class LSPs require tests that include skills such as:

- Bidirectional language proficiency from English into the target language and the target language into English
- Ability to understand written and spoken grammar and syntax in the language
- Industry-specific terminology
- Accuracy and completeness (memory retention, note-taking, and conversion skills)
- Interpretation protocol
- Customer service skills

3 **How were the test(s) developed? Have they been validated by third-party experts?**

Best-in-class LSPs typically have their tests validated by third-party industry experts to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the testing and to ensure that the tests measure what they are intended to measure.

4 **How are the tests results evaluated?**

Best-in-class LSPs score the tests using a combination of electronic and human evaluation by skilled raters. Since language is nuanced and representative of cultural norms, it is important to have the language proficiency elements of the tests scored by human evaluators.

5 **What are the qualifications for the evaluators?**

This question establishes the competency and skill level of the assessor.

6 **Are candidates required to pass background checks and drug screening tests?**

What is included in the background check? Best-in-class LSPs understand that the integrity of the candidate is important given the often sensitive or valuable information and situations that the interpreters are required to handle.

7 **What percentage of your interpreter workforce are employees or contractors?**

This question helps validate the commitment to a qualified interpreter workforce to meet the extensive language demand. Best-in-class LSPs will have a combination of employee interpreters and contractors, as contractors are often required for rarer languages. Although the common belief is that contractors are less qualified, top LSPs can prove that all sessions, no matter the employment classification, are handled by qualified interpreters who are all held to the same high standards.

Interpreter New Hire Training

1 **What comprises your new hire training program?**

Best-in-class LSP's new hire training programs instruct the interpreter in:

- The role of the interpreter–neutral, unbiased, impartial
- Interpreter skills: Note-taking, attentive listening, active memory
- Linguistic cultural challenges
- Confidentiality–interpreter code of ethics
- Specialized vocabulary

2 **Is there additional training for video interpreters?**

There are additional skills required to be a successful video interpreter, including:

- A professional appearance: Neatly dressed, professionally groomed
- Preparation to take video calls
- Ability to deliver face-to-face customer service
- Understanding of the video platform

3 **What industry-specific trainings are your interpreters required to master? What is the content of these modules?**

This question validates that interpreters have the industry knowledge and vocabulary to interpret across industries. It is important to work with an LSP that has the industry knowledge you require.

4 **Are industry-specific modules validated by experts in their fields?**

This question helps determine the quality of the content and the validity of the industry-specific training.

5 **How are the training modules delivered?**

Best-in-class training delivery utilizes a blended approach of both instructor-led and web-based delivery. The inclusion of web-based delivery increases the effectiveness of the training as the trainee can master the content efficiently and review content areas that may need further study.

6 **How do you ensure that trainees have mastered the content?**

Best-in-class LSPs test their trainees to ensure mastery of the content and have a well-developed quality assurance process in place.

7 **How many total hours of training do these modules represent? Can you break the hours down by module?**

The number of hours of training by itself is not a reliable indicator of an outstanding training program, but is a gauge of completeness. The critical criteria to evaluate are the quality and completeness of the training program's content and the trainees' ability to demonstrate mastery of that content.

8 **What are the qualifications of your trainers and coaches?**

The question validates the LSP's commitment to qualified and competent trainers/coaches which is essential to developing a professional interpreter workforce.

Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Ongoing Development and Support

1 **Do you monitor calls for quality interpretation?**

This question demonstrates the LSP's commitment to quality assurance.

2 **What qualifications are required to be a quality assurance monitor?**

This question demonstrates the LSP's commitment to qualified and competent quality assurance monitors who are responsible for evaluating interpreter performance against a set of standards and maintaining a high-quality, professional interpreter workforce.

3 **What remediation processes are in place to ensure quality of interpretation?**

Best-in-class LSPs have remediation processes in place for quality interpretation that include additional training, coaching and monitoring up to dismissal, depending on the type of occurrence and frequency.

4 **How do you monitor the production and sound quality of your video sessions?**

Best-in-class service providers ensure that each video session is a professional interpreting experience. The LSP should be able to verify quality assurance, through live and remote observations of the interpreter during video interpreting sessions, is ongoing, and that appropriate actions are in place to ensure interpreter compliance. The interpreter should be centered in the screen, maintain correct posture/position, be wearing appropriate attire, and have correct lighting and background

5 **Do you have a client feedback loop for interpreter quality, video production and sound quality?**

Best-in-class LSPs strive to meet the needs of their clients. Well-defined and managed feedback loops that are easy to access and submit ensure that providers are listening to and satisfying the demands of their clients.

6 **Do you supply reference materials to your interpreters?**

If yes, please describe the materials. Best-inclass providers work diligently to supply support materials for their interpreter workforce. Typically, these materials will include regularly updated dictionaries of commonly used new words, expressions and processes that are being used within specific industries.

7 **How do you alert your interpreters of important industry or interpreter skill changes?**

This question helps to determine how committed the LSP is to relevancy within the industry as every business process, regardless of industry, is continually changing.

8 **What is your annual investment to maintain a quality interpreter workforce?**

Maintaining a quality interpreter workforce requires an annual financial commitment for recruiting, training, and quality assurance.

9 **Do you have liability insurance that covers wrongful acts?**

Best-in-class LSPs typically carry insurance that covers wrongful acts, given the often sensitive and critical nature of the information that is being interpreted, to mitigate risks related to interpreting. Coverage should include contingent bodily injury, property damage, and wrongful acts, i.e., the disclosure of confidential information.

10 **Are your employees and contractors held to the same high standards?**

It is not uncommon for LSPs to staff with a mix of employees and contractors. For larger LSPs, contractors are commonly used for rare languages. All interpreters should be tested, trained, monitored, and held to the same quality standards.

Procedures and Policies to Ensure Safety and Security of Information

1 **How do you ensure that the confidential information your interpreters handle is safe and secure?**

Best-in-class LSPs have platform security features and strict code of conduct policies that cover the safe and secure handling of client information. The hardware and any software that interpreters use to connect with the LSP and you should be protected and secure. Additionally, codes of conduct are supported by various policies and procedures that are regularly monitored for compliance. These policies include things such as background screening and drug tests, clean desks, interpreter system access, interpreter call note-taking, and more.

Interpreter Location and Call Routing

Different clients have different needs when selecting an LSP. Some have requirements to utilize U.S.-based interpreters, while others believe the safety and security of the information being interpreted is of paramount importance. However, the one need they all have in common is the need for the very best interpretation experience for their employees and the LEP and Deaf or Hard of Hearing communities they serve. These questions will help you understand if your specific needs are being met.

1 Where are your interpreters located?

Staffing a strong, professional, highly qualified interpreter workforce to handle large call volumes in hundreds of languages, 24/7, is a complicated yet imperative task for LSPs. There are a variety of interpreter workforce models used throughout the industry to meet the ever-growing demand for language access services. Best-in-class LSPs have the flexibility and capability to support multiple models, with superior quality, based on their clients' business needs. Whether interpreters are based globally or domestically, in secure call centers or working from home, the quality and security of the interpretation session is of paramount importance. Wherever the interpreters are located, understand the level of interpreter training and supervision and the safety and security policies of the LSP to ensure these standards will meet your needs.

2 How are calls routed to the interpreter?

When selecting an LSP, it is important to understand how calls are matched with interpreters. Best-in-class LSPs use sophisticated skills-based routing software, versus first available, to process each call to an interpreter who is trained specifically for that event, whether it is medical, a 911 call, legal or financial. The ability to route calls to interpreters with the correct skill set for each client ensures the accuracy and speed of the interpretation session and facilities the very best call outcome.
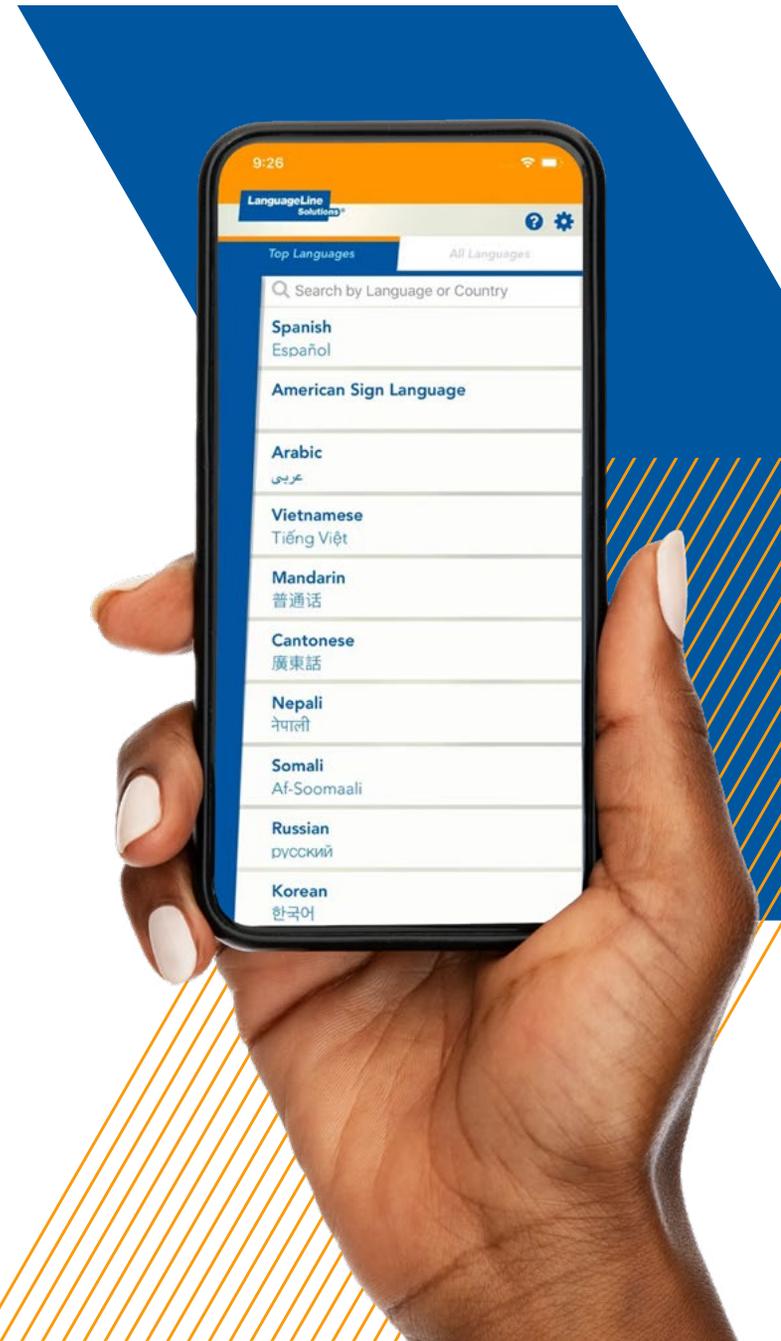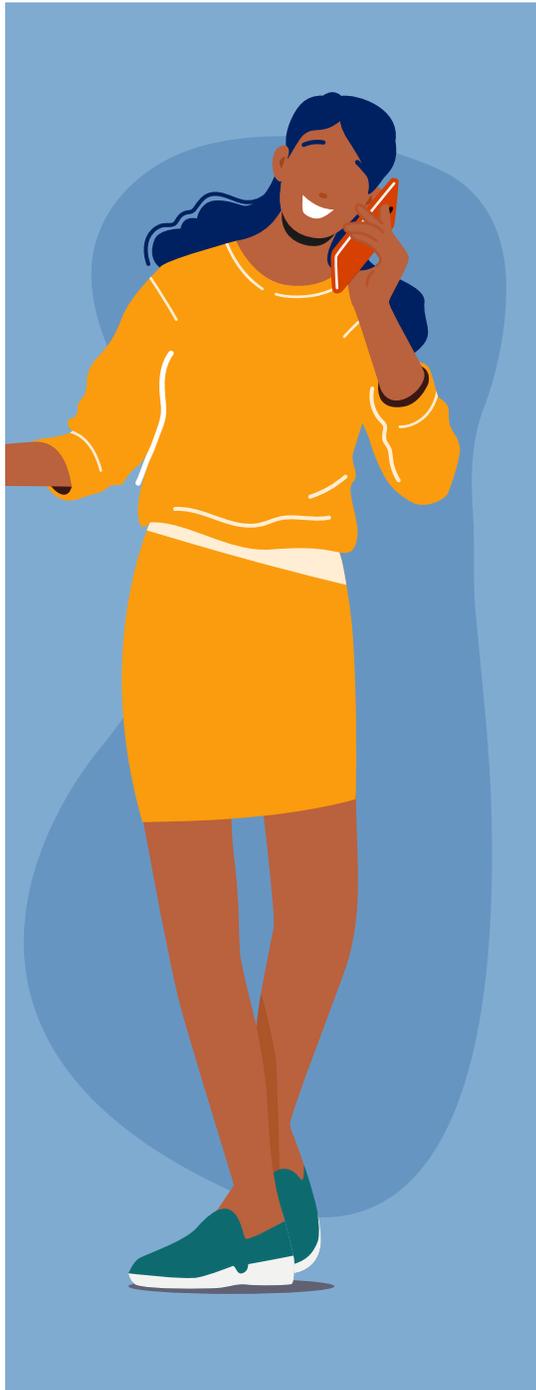
Speed of Delivery: Connect Time To An Interpreter

Interpreter connect time is a critical success factor for a quality on-demand interpretation program and an optimal customer experience. These questions will help you understand how each LSP is measuring connect time to the interpreter and their ability to consistently deliver outstanding results.

1   **How many seconds does it take to connect to a audit and video interpreter? Please describe how you measure the process.**

When evaluating speed to an interpreter, it's important to understand how the measurement is being taken. LSPs use various interpreter connect processes—some go directly to an interpreter, some use a call agent to gather data before connecting to an interpreter, some use an automated IVR to gather that data, and many use a combination of each of these methods.

2   **What are your annual average call volumes, audio/video? How many interpreters do you employee?**

The ability to consistently handle large call volumes demonstrates a capable infrastructure that can adjust to surges in volume. Additionally, an increase in call volumes can negatively affect speed to answer if the LSP is not properly staffed. Call volumes in combination with speed to answer is also a reliable indication of outstanding performance over time.

3   **For video interpretation, what is your video interpreter fill rate?**

Most video interpreting platforms have the ability to default to audio if the video interpreter wait time is excessive or no video interpreter is available at all. It is important to understand how often the video interpretation request is filled with a video rather than audio interpreter, to ensure you will be able to receive the service you desired.

4   **Are you scalable? Can you meet increased demands? To what extent?**

LSPs that can scale to demand immediately will be able to support any number of calls at the same time. Ensure that the LSP has the capacity to handle thousands of calls simultaneously at any given time.

Safety and Security of Information and Systems

These questions will help you understand the LSP's commitment to ensuring that your sensitive client information remains secure and confidential.

1 **What policies and procedures do you have in place to protect the safety and security of the information that your interpreters handle? How do you ensure that interpreters follow these procedures?**

Whether in a call center with hundreds of interpreters or a secure "center of one" working from home, best-in-class LSPs go to great lengths to ensure that the privileged and confidential information shared during interpretation sessions remains safe and secure.

2 **What happens in the event that an interpreter breaches the security of the information?**

Best-in-class LSPs have policies in place to manage breaches of conduct and carry insurance to cover security breaches.

3 **Has your institution participated in client security and operational audits? If yes, how many? What types and sizes of institutions requested the audits? What were the outcomes of these audits?**

Client security and operational audits are typically requested by large clients whose risk management requirements are strict. Passing these very stringent audits is an indication of the strength and effectiveness of the LSP's security policies and procedures.

Criteria to Evaluate the Support Provided by the Language Services Provider

Client support is as essential to the success of your on-demand interpretation solution as the service itself. Simply purchasing the service is only one step. Monitoring and optimizing the service is the next.

Optimizing Your Interpretation Solution

It is important to understand that your interpretation solution is dynamic. A one-and-done implementation will not maximize the benefits of your investment. New staff will need to be trained, and equipment and staff reference materials will need to be reevaluated and augmented or replaced. Best-in-class LSPs typically have well documented implementation processes that can be shared with clients for continuous self implementation which are supported by their account executives and client support staff. These questions will help you understand the LSP's commitment to client support.

1 **What implementation support do you provide with the service? Is there an additional charge to roll out the service?**

Best-in-class LSPs provide quality, on-site implementations for large installations, including:

- An organizational walk through to determine equipment and technical needs
- Coordination with your organization's IT department
- Equipment delivery and installation
- Staff training on how to use the equipment to access the service
- Staff training on how to effectively partner with an interpreter
- Staff training on compliance with language access mandates

For smaller implementations, providers deliver thorough written and video self-help training materials for clients to utilize at their convenience with the support of the client's LSP account executive.

2 **What client and staff implementation support materials do you provide?**

Is there an additional charge for these materials? Best-in-class LSPs provide client support materials to help staff quickly access language services and support the initial encounter with LEP clients. They also provide in-language signage for your facilities that promote the availability of interpretation services in top languages. This directly supports compliance with language access laws, and is at the heart of improved customer experience for LEP persons. Additionally, best-in-class LSPs offer support materials that improve staff efficiency and the customer experience. These include a variety of tools to identify the language a person speaks.

Client Support

Interpreter connect time is a critical success factor for a quality on-demand interpretation program and an optimal customer experience. These questions will help you understand how each LSP is measuring connect time to the interpreter and their ability to consistently deliver outstanding results.

1 **What reporting do you have available to track usage and billing of the service?**

Best-inclass LSPs have robust reporting capabilities and 24/7 access to client portals that can provide data on the languages interpreted and minutes of usage. This information not only validates correct billing, but also provides insight so you can manage your language access needs efficiently. For example, the growing frequency of a language may lead you to a decision to test your bilingual staff to determine if they can meet the language needs of an emerging population.

2 **Are you able to support compliance requirements for language services?**

Best-in-class LSPs offer accurate interpreter training records to verify the quality of interpreters used. They also provide attestations to demonstrate interpreters' skills.

3 **What overall support do you provide to answer day-to-day questions and provide guidance?**

Best-in-class LSPs have multiple modes of client support. These can include assigned account teams for ongoing account management, client portals for easy and fast access to your information, customer service options, and well-defined feedback processes.

4 **What technical support is provided for audio and for video interpreting?**

To ensure successful implementation of audio or video interpreting solutions, best-in-class LSPs offer technical support and will work with your IT department to successfully deploy hardware solutions and maintain software applications. Video interpreting technical support should be available 24/7 to troubleshoot problems and solve connection issues.

Criteria to Evaluate the Technical Capabilities of the Language Service Provider

In today's fast-paced, ever-evolving world of technology, it is important for LSPs to constantly be evaluating new technical solutions to improve the speed, quality and variety of language access solutions they provide. After all, those who remain complacent are simply left behind. It is also important that any new technology upgrade or service, while most likely complex, remain easy to use for the client, their staff, and the LEP and Deaf or Hard or Hearing communities. These questions will establish the criteria to determine the technical health of the LSPs you are considering.

1 What technologies have you deployed to facilitate language access? When were they deployed and updated?

Best-in-class LSPs continuously scan the technical landscape searching for opportunities to improve service delivery, especially given the explosion in demand for language access services. LSPs that have not made technical upgrades are relying on old technologies that are susceptible to slow connect times due to increasing call volumes. Also, antiquated security protocols are not able to easily support integrated language access programs in a mobile society and may not be safe and secure.

2 What is your system availability rate?

Access to the LSP's service platform is a key determinant for reliable language access. Best-in-class providers typically deliver no less than 99 percent uptime, and can prove it.

3 What is your percentage of dropped calls?

The percentage of dropped calls is an indication of the reliability and stability of the LSP's platform. Ask for this measurement over a time period that covers at least six months.

4 What is your service issue resolution time?

When service issues do occur, it is important to understand the elapsed time to resolution. A brief elapsed time indicates a well-designed mitigation process. Again, ask for this measurement over a period of time that covers no less than six months.

5 **How do you guarantee the safety of the information within the system?**

Every organization has a responsibility to protect the information of the clients it serves. Introducing third-party ondemand interpreters via phone or video to facilitate client conversations improves understanding but also adds a layer of potential risk through telecommunication systems or any recorded data. There are serious consequences for organizations inadvertently exposing their clients' personal health information, personally identifiable information, trade secrets, or more. Best-in-class LSPs have encryption technology and processes in place to prevent and mitigate any breach of security. It's critical you understand the level of security of the LSP's network and communication infrastructure.

6 **What is the bandwidth capability of your video interpreting service?**

As video interpreting technology begins to mature, fixed bandwidths are being replaced by variable bandwidths which automatically adjust video quality for the available bandwidth, with the ability to roll over to audio should available bandwidth become unacceptable during the call.

7 **Do you have a business continuity plan? Am I able to review it?**

Best-in-class LSPs have robust business continuity plans that describe in detail redundancy, resiliency and security. They review and test the plan regularly to ensure all team members know their roles and responsibilities during any serious event.

8 **What safety and security certifications does your organization currently hold?**

Best-inclass LSPs typically hold several certifications that attest to the safety and security of their systems and information. Some of the most common certifications include:

- ISO 9000
- COSO 2013 framework for SOX Compliance
- GDPR compliance

Criteria to Evaluate the On-Demand Interpreting Product Capabilities of the Language Service Provider

Specialized equipment and robust product features that can be easily accessed and/or customized to meet your organization's needs are essential to the success of your program. Features that help increase staff productivity, provide improved service and care, comply with laws and regulations, and reduce expenses ensure an optimal experience for all. Hardware and equipment options help deliver easy and quick access to on-demand interpreting. These questions will establish the criteria to determine the capabilities and features of the on-demand products that support the interpretation interaction.

1 **Do your audio and video interpreting services require specialized equipment? What type of equipment options are there?**

Although audio interpreters can be accessed through standard landline and cellular telephone equipment, LSPs typically offer additional over-the-phone interpreting hardware for your convenience such as dual handset phones, which can be preprogrammed with account information to minimize the time required for data entry while allowing for privacy and convenience during the interpreting session. Software applications, apps, deliver access to both audio and video interpretation. Some providers require specialized equipment while others offer apps that are compatible with iPads, PCs, tablets, and smartphones so no equipment purchase may be necessary. Additionally, LSPs can offer rolling carts, audio amplification enclosures, and tabletop stands to improve mobility and the interpreting experience. Best-in-class service providers can assess your needs and recommend which hardware and product features should be implemented to meet your organization's unique requirements.

2 **What methods are available for accessing phone interpreters?**

Best-in-class LSPs have a variety of customizable options available for accessing audio interpreters so their clients' business needs can be met. These options include generic or custom interactive voice response technology (IVR), call agents and direct-to-interpreter applications. When thinking about your preferred method for accessing interpreters, please balance carefully the need for speed to the interpreter with the need to collect business data such as information to track location of the call.

3 **When accessing interpreters through the video application, what features are available to help manage the session and usage?**

Managing a video session has its own unique options. LSPs with a robust platform can offer features that help deliver sessions and manage usage, including:

- Video privacy requests–does the platform have a video privacy feature and is the interpreter prepared to use it upon request?
- Whiteboard functionality–does the platform have the ability to transcribe short, simple written messages onscreen and in-language?
- Location–based security features–can the application usage be restricted based on IP address or geographical location?

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