The Dangers of Treating Transcription Like a Commodity

The Danger of Commoditization

If your company is in need of large volumes of transcription work, there is an inevitable temptation to start following the “words are words” approach and to negotiate contracts with transcription services on the basis of the amount of work being done rather than defining the type of transcription being delivered. Just as economic and financial modelers propose generic widgets to represent the products being manufactured, contract discussions suddenly center on “how much for a three-minute audio or video file?” Vendors that respond to such questions will probably build-in some maneuvering room in their price quotes to protect themselves against any unanticipated client requests, or they may attach so many provisos and caveats to their response that the bottom line per-minute quote may bear no relation to the final invoice figure.

The Value of Transparency

Professional transcription services are too familiar with the multiple variables in every project to run the risk of misleading or confusing a client with a flat per-minute quote for a file they may have yet to review. This might be very frustrating for those clients looking to filter out potential vendors for an urgent project with a fixed budget, but isn't it better to get an accurate quote for a poor quality audio file up front than to start working with a vendor on an agreed price only to be told that the file "has issues" and that the final price will be significantly higher?

More Than Just The Words!

There's no doubt that the finished product is an accurate record of the words spoken on the audio or video file, but the process transcriptionists follow to deliver that product requires many more decisions from a client than just the price for the work. Turnaround time (TAT) is of great importance for critical projects, and many hungry freelancers will promise to work through the night to perform near-miracles in meeting a client's urgent deadline. However, is your file of sufficient quality to facilitate a fast TAT? Is the material crammed with industry-specific jargon that an inexperienced transcriptionist will need to double-check and/or verify? Are you looking for a verbatim capture of every utterance or a clean summary of the conversation or presentation with repetitions, stuttering, and pauses removed to improve text flow? Another advantage of playing online slots is the potential to win big. Many online casinos offer progressive jackpot slots, which are linked to a network of other machines and can offer huge payouts. While the odds of hitting the jackpot are slim, the potential payout can be life-changing. All of these requests can extend a TAT, and if the transcriptionist agrees to the deadline without a prior review

of the file, you may have a problem.

Every File is Different

A visit to a large transcription company might look like the cube farm of a traditional office or call center – dozens of computer stations with professional transcriptionists listening carefully on their headsets. The perception of a ‘word factory’ would be understandable, but in reality, every file is different. The quality of the audio or video file; the content of each conversation or presentation; the clarity of the speaker; the accent; the use of colloquialisms or industry jargon; all of these variables make each transcription unique, even if you interviewed fifty different people about the same topic.

Commodity pricing can definitely make everyone’s life a little easier when working with large volume contracts, but such contracts are built on generic units of production – a definition that accurate, highly quality transcripts would never claim to be.