

# Planning for Simultaneous Interpretation



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## Introduction

This guide is to help you plan and understand the important role of Simultaneous Interpretation (SI) in organising your congress. If it is your first use of SI it will help you understand the processes and requirements from every perspective from planner, delegate, interpreter to technician.

## What is Simultaneous Interpretation?

Simultaneous Interpretation (SI) is used at a congress where more than one language is used but where not all those attending can understand the all the languages spoken. It is the process of converting the spoken word from one language in to another in near real time (Simultaneously). It is termed 'Interpretation' as it is concerned with the true meaning of the communication rather than a 'Translation' which is a literal conversion from one language to another.

## How does it work?

Simultaneous Interpretation is performed by real live people, they are not expected to be replaced by machine translation at any time soon, as computers have difficulty in coping with humour, sarcasm and physical gesture!. Google translate, though very clever is no substitute.

The interpreter listens to what is being said and at the same time renders what they hear orally in into their specialist language. The interpreter's spoken words are then broadcast to the delegates. This process is facilitated by specialist audio equipment within sound attenuating interpreter 'booths' or 'cabins' usually located at the back of the meeting room.

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## Your Interpreters

Your interpreters are the most important element of any simultaneous interpretation service. Your team of interpreters, if not local, will need accommodation and transport like your delegates, they will also need sustenance during the day. These additional expenses are usually not included in the quotation, they can be estimated prior to booking but they will be subject to the costs encountered on the day and are normally charged on at cost. The organiser may also be able to accommodate some of the costs within the delegate bookings.

Interpreters normally work in a pair for every language covered, each interpreter working 20 min at a time, relaying between each other so giving a continuous service. Most teams are bi-lingual i.e. French - English / English - French, so covering a simple two language requirement is done from a single booth.

Should you require more than two languages (English + French + German + Spanish etc) each additional language will require another booth with two more interpreters.

## Subject information and background

It is important that your interpreters are given as much background information as possible to help them prepare for your subject. This is especially relevant if the subject is medical, technical, financial or indeed any subject that has its own vocabulary and acronyms. There are specialist interpreters in every field but a good interpreter will benefit greatly from background materials. Materials may include:-

- Presentations,
- Agendas,
- Delegate lists,
- Biographies of presenters,
- Websites and any other online content (YouTube etc..)
- Reports

## Recording the meeting

Recording the original or floor sound is without copyright. If however you wish to record a language (e.g. English) then this may carry the output of every interpreter which IS copyrighted and maybe subject to fees depending on usage. Normally if the recording is to be used for internal minutes any fees are generally waived, however if it is to be used in broadcast there will need to be a broadcast or recording fee negotiated.

Technically there are no problems in giving a feed for a recording to be made.

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## What equipment is required?

- Interpreters Booth. The most evident piece of equipment is the interpreter booth. This isolates the interpreter from the rest of the room so as not to disturb the meeting and to prevent microphones picking up external audio and cross talk.
- Interpreters Console. The booth is equipped with an interpreter's console through which they listen to the 'original' or 'floor' language via headphones. The console has a microphone to pick up the interpreters output and allows the interpreter to route their output to the correct broadcast channel.
- Transmission system. The transmission system transmits the interpreters output to the delegates. Normally broadcasting using Infra Red light the transmission system is made up of two main components. The transmitter (or modulator) and IR emitter panels. Only 1 transmitter is required but the number of emitter panels required is dependent on the room size and number of languages to be transmitted.
- Delegate Receiver. The delegate receiver is a small receiver pack, with headphones, that allows the delegate to select the desired channel or language and adjust their listening volume.
- Delegate Microphone. Delegate microphones or push to talk microphones become part of the interpretation system when the meeting is a full discussion meeting. This is where all participants are active and contribute to the proceedings. This is to allow a quick flow of discussion while giving optimum audio quality for the interpreters to work effectively. Some microphone discussion systems also carry the interpretation back to the delegates via inbuilt channel selectors so removing the need for an IR transmission system and receivers.



Examples of equipment required, Interpreter Console, Infrared Transmitter, Infrared Radiator & Delegate Headsets.

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## Audio (Technical notes for the sound engineer)

The SI system will take a feed from the installed audio for the event. This forms what is known as the 'Floor' or 'Original' signal. The interpreter listens to the original via headphones so it is important that the quality of the audio be free of hum and unnecessary noise. To ensure that this is so the feed provided should be:-

- On a balanced line from an 'aux' or 'group' send (Post fade)
- Only microphones in actual use to be live
- No ambient or room microphones in the audio
- No partial fades to 'catch all'

\*Partial fades to catch all, without feedback, are OK for PA use but add so much background noise to the audio that when listened to on headphones will cause listening fatigue for the interpreters. This can also catch unguarded comments which, if the floor is transmitted, will result in broadcast to the delegates using the receivers where these comments will be much more audible.



Typical Technicians area for an Interpretation system with and PA

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## When do I need to start planning for Simultaneous Interpretation?

Ideally as soon as possible for various reasons but the main being...

- To attract foreign delegates you may need to advertise that interpretation will be provided in certain languages.
- The venue will need to be able to accommodate the booths so you will need to consider this when booking.
- The earlier the interpreters are booked the more likely you are to secure local and or high quality interpreters. Engaging the interpreters early will also allow timely booking of transport so taking advantage of early bird discounts.
- Interpreters will be able to research the subject and prepare.
- The fact that your event will be multilingual will also affect other aspects of the congress in terms of translation of papers, bookings in different currencies, multilingual web site, entertainment, and just general awareness of languages.
- Simultaneous Interpretation services are not particularly cheap and will need to be budgeted for.

## Booth placement and size

You should consider where your booths should go when planning your venue. Allow a foot print of 1.7m (W) x 1.7m (D) x 2.0m (H) for each booth. Also allow for an 80cm door swing. If placing in a long row allow at least a 1m wide corridor space along the back of the booths.

Please also consider sight lines to allow the interpreters to see the screen, top table and lectern clearly. Staging is available to raise the height of the booths to improve sight lines.

If there is no space in the room for the booths then a full camera system will need to relay a visual of the room to monitors. This can add to the cost and should be avoided if possible purely on the basis that it may compromise on the quality of the interpretation, however some times it is unavoidable and we can supply the required remote controlled cameras and all the monitors needed to relay the images to the interpreters.



A conference with 4 booths at the back of the room

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## Distribution and collection of the Headsets and Receivers:

The receivers will need to be distributed to your delegates to allow them to listen to their desired language. At the end of the day they will need to be collected again. This process is normally the responsibility of the hirer though the onsite technical staff will assist as much as possible.

The receivers cost £200 each to buy and should be looked after, with care taken in their distribution and collection as the liability for losses remains with the hirer. Losses are usually small and are normally returned within a week. Losses are more likely to be sustained not by purposeful theft but by accidental placement in bags etc..

The liability to the hirer extends, and is limited to, the replacement cost of the units lost. This is invoiced separately (but at the same time) to the job invoice. As receivers are returned we will issue credit notes. Credit notes / refunds will be issued for up to a year from the date of loss.

The receivers can't be used for any other purpose or function.

Distribution and collection is normally carried out by the clients 'on the day' staff. Depending on the size of audience and the seating arrangements of the event there are differing methods to best proceed with the distribution.



To aid distribution and collection we can provide headset bags and collection point signage.

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## Theatre style.

Distribute at the points of entry to the hall, giving each delegate a receiver as they enter the hall. This prevents receiver placement in areas where no one is seated and ensures only the correct number of receivers are distributed. Many theatres have flip up seats which also makes placement difficult without losing the receiver down the back of the seat. We would recommend 1 on the day staff member per 100 receivers to cope with peak flow at the start and end of the sessions. Actively ask delegates to return their receivers to a collection point when exiting and ensure staff are available to receive them.

## Cabaret, Class and Board room styles.

Place receivers on the tables at each place setting. We would recommend 1 staff member per 200 delegates. At the end of the session ask delegates to leave the receiver on the table for collection.

In all instances receivers are cased and presented in boxes of 50. To ensure accurate counting and notification of any losses all receivers must be returned to the boxes ensuring all spaces are filled. Our technician will always play an active role in the distribution and collection of the receivers.

## Receiver and headset.



The Bosch LBB4540/32 receiver is a digital infrared (IR) receiver with simple to use controls for volume and channel selection. A 'Start' button turns the receiver on. The receiver switches off in the absence of a recognisable IR signal or when the headset is removed. Capable of 32 channels (original + 31 languages). The digital signal gives a far clearer audio with no 'hiss' so reducing listener fatigue. The LBB4540/32 is currently the most advance receiver available. The receivers come with a Bosch

Ear Shells are available on request. An ear shell is a single ear piece that clips to the ear. Usually reserved for use on a top table or videoed proceedings where headsets need to be less evident.

Induction Loop necklaces can be plugged in to the receivers for those wearing T switch hearing aids. This negates the need for a separate hearing aid loop and provides multi lingual capacity to hearing aid users.

Earphones can be sourced for specialised applications. e.g. for use under ear defenders, religious headdress or for hygiene concerns. In these instances the earphones are sold to the client as they are not suitable for cleaning and re issue.

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## Your Interpreters Continued... (Things you don't need to know but are quite interesting)

When you have a larger system it may be worthwhile considering an English booth. This allows for good clear relay for all languages. Relay is where an interpreter listens to the output of another as their source. This, by example, occurs when German is the 'Floor language', the German is interpreted into English by the English booth and the English is then re-interpreted into French by the French booth. This has then passed through 1 level of relay.

Interpreters work to a system of 'A' and 'B' language proficiency. 'A' would mean they can interpret into that language. 'B' means they can interpret from that language. Some interpreters can have more than one 'B' language which opens the possibility of 'active' and 'passive' languages. Active is where a delegate may speak and listen to their desired language. Passive is where a delegate may speak their desired language but they listen to another which they are proficient enough to understand. This way it may be possible to support more languages with fewer booths but it is wholly dependent on the availability of the interpreters capable of the necessary language combination.

The upper limit of the languages provided in any one system is 32. This is the current upper limit of the electronics facilitating the process.



Inside the Interpreters Booth mid conference

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