

## A Hot Date With LISA

**The localization industry is maturing – and with it an organization dedicated to its needs.**

Representatives from leading documentation and translation companies rubbed elbows with (potential) customers among major IT players at the first annual Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA) meeting held in Dublin, May 13 and 14th. Dublin was an understandable choice for the site of this gathering, as an impressive number of American software and hardware companies have set up European localization operations in Ireland, not least of all the host of the LISA meeting, Microsoft Ireland. The ready supply of Guinness may have something to do with this influx from abroad, and Ireland's inspirational ten percent ceiling on corporate taxes for computer-related activities must make the decision to settle here that much easier.

While a series of panel presentations formed the ostensible focus of the two-day LISA gathering, generously long coffee and lunch breaks left plenty of time for the participants to mingle and exchange business cards amid the Edwardian opulence of Dublin's stately Shelborne Hotel. Two panels highlighted key localization issues from the perspectives of buyers and suppliers, bringing to light such key issues as the conflicting requirements of central coordination and local translation, and the increasing pressure to deliver localized packages at the same time as US versions. Buyers brought up the sensitive matter of supplier evaluation, while suppliers wondered how to win customer loyalty in this fickle branch. While many localization practitioners voiced their commitment to technology, few seem to have been able to fully capitalize on it, constrained partly by the tight operating margins endemic to this industry. Such discussions are not academic; while localization has become a big business, there is not yet a translation company on the scene with the infrastructure to handle all of the requirements of a major software house. The application of formal quality metrics to translation company activities in the form of the ISO 9000 standard is one way forward, and this was the subject of a third panel. Two more sessions cast light on practical issues surrounding the implementation of machine translation and restricted English, with both users and suppliers of each of these potentially important technologies fueling the discussion.

It was a fruitful two days for anyone doing business in the localization industry, whichever side of the table they happen to be on. It would be good to see the LISA conference become a regular event. At the moment, however, the future of LISA looks uncertain. The organization is encumbered by a top heavy management structure and it is going through something of an identity crisis. Is LISA an insider's club for an elite few to compare management notes? Is it a genuine standards organization with an open nature and collaborative goals? These questions need to be asked by the management level members, for they are certainly being asked by the new associate members, and the future of the organization depends on these issues being resolved. LISA could evolve a two-track character, with the core management board setting its own agenda and the associate members tagging along, in which case the organization's name is misleading. Or LISA could opt to restructure itself, with open membership, flat (and modest) membership fees, a small elected executive board, and satellite working groups tackling standardization issues and such. The whole might revolve around a substantial annual meeting along the lines of this year's Dublin event, with continuity in the form of a beefed up quarterly newsletter. The LISA conference could be held anywhere, but there may not be a better place for it than Dublin, the localization center of Europe.