

ALPS strengthens its operating team

Entrepreneur Fred Zirkle is new ALPS president; Rick Warner visits Europe.

The US computer translation company ALPS has strengthened its operating team, with the appointment of a new international president and new regional managers in Europe.

The company, which has 65 employees and markets an interactive computer-assisted translation system and a range of computer aids for the translator, sees Europe as its principal sales growth area.

The new president is Fred Zirkle, a business entrepreneur whose career has been mainly spent in the computer sector. He joined Key Tronic, a computer component manufacturer of keyboards, at its founding in 1969, built up its domestic sales force, and formed its off-shore subsidiaries and sales organisation in Europe and Canada. When he left in 1981, to set up a venture capital fund called Venture Sum, Key Tronic had an annual revenue of \$70 million, and 12 of his staff had become dollar multi-millionaires by means of the company's profit share incentive plan.

Rick Warner, the leading Utah businessman who is chairman of the ALPS board, and who has been raising investment capital for the company, first approached Fred Zirkle with a view to getting Venture Sum to invest in ALPS. Mr Zirkle's interest was aroused, and he became so convinced of the company's potential that he decided to accept the position of president (equivalent to managing director in English terms).

The ALPS leadership see Europe as the key to the company's future. "Europe is where the action is", Rick Warner told *Language Monthly*. "Even the multinationals are having their translations done in the countries where the products are sold".

The translation bureau and sales activities in the United States are being trimmed back so that the European operation can be enhanced. The only department in the United States which has remained untouched by the slimming down is Research and Development, whose work is considered essential to the company's future.

In addition to its European headquarters in Neuchatel, Switzerland, opened last autumn, sales and customer support offices are being opened in England, France and the Federal Republic of Germany, and regional managers appointed to head them (Angus Pritchard-Gordon in London, Rainer Jung in Frankfurt, and Yves Dufour in Paris).

Positive reactions from ALPS customers

The month of April was one of success for ALPS, as major multinationals among their customers reported in on the results of their evaluations of equipment already installed.

Patrick Olenczak, manager, European documentation for Texas Instruments, in Nice, France, telephoned in to the Neuchatel office to report that after one month's installation the two terminals using the ALPS system had brought down the costs of translation, typesetting and interfacing from \$55 a page to \$25 a page.

A few days later ALPS European director Marc Matoza received a letter from Walter Molden, manager at the IBM European Language Services Centre in Copenhagen, giving initial reactions at the end of the first stage of evaluation of four ALPS systems they had acquired.

"I would like you to know," he wrote, "that we have concluded the first phase of our English to Italian ALPS test.

"The results are very promising and we are convinced that the system can give us a significant improvement in translation productivity. We believe that we now have a sufficient understanding of the system's productivity."

Mike Anobile gave a presentation of the system to Hewlett Packard in Geneva, also in April, and was able

to quote two reports from Hewlett Packard centres on using the ALPS system. One was a "benchmark report", dated November 1984, produced by Marc Nodier, of Hewlett Packard's GPCD division in Grenoble, where the system had been tried out on the translation of software user manual material. The report stated that the translation provided was of good quality, the turnround time had been 150% lower than when using standard translation techniques, and a projected financial analysis had shown that using ALPS brought down the cost of translation in the first year (including full allowance for depreciation, training fees, salaries etc.) from 18 US cents a word (sub-contracting costs) to 14 cents a word. Over a total translation time of 40 hours the use of the ALPS system yielded an output of 630 words an hour compared with 250 words an hour with standard techniques, with an additional three hours in each case for final checking. Another report was of an evaluation carried out by the Hewlett Packard centre at Guadalajara in Mexico, where work was done on a 20,000 word document by contracted personnel whose previous translation speeds had been less than 200 words an hour. Detailed worksheets were kept and analysed, and showed the highest recorded burst of output was 1,321 words in a 45-minute period. The high average level was 1,049 words an hour, the mean average 893 words an hour, the low average 567 words an hour, and the lowest average achieved 465 words an hour.

Rick Warner and Fred Zirkle visited Europe in March, making two separate tours taking in a number of European countries, before meeting up for a board meeting in Neuchatel. Language Monthly caught up with Rick Warner in London, and over a meal between booking out of his hotel and catching a flight to Copenhagen he explained how he, one of America's most successful car and truck dealers, had come to be involved with computer foreign language translation.

As a young man he had joined the Bennett Motor Company, who were Ford dealers in Salt Lake City, working in the first weeks as a mechanic's assistant, but gradually rising through the company until he became co-manager. In 1965 he started to buy out the company, which eventually changed its name to Rick Warner Ford and became one of the country's top dealerships. Sales, which had stood at \$11 million in 1954, had risen to \$84 million in 1978.

As a successful businessman, and a devout member of the Mormon Church, in which he holds the position of bishop, he has become one of the leading citizens of the state of Utah, a member of a number of public bodies, councils and associations. When it was decided to convert the automatic language processing project at Brigham Young university into a commercial project, Rick Warner was a natural person to approach for support.

And he had already been predisposed to the use of computers. Every Friday without fail he lunches with his two brothers and brother-in-law, and after lunch one week one brother, Dr Homer Warner, took him to see his work on using computers in medical diagnosis. Rick Warner was fascinated, and has since been involved in the company marketing this system, Medlab Computer Services Inc., which has had considerable success throughout the states.

He is convinced that ALPS has a tremendous future, and he has been able to communicate his faith to a number of large investors, so that ALPS is now capitalised at \$11 million dollars. Most of the investors are American, but the visit to London was mainly to talk to a major British investor.

Rick Warner told Language Monthly that his principle of business had always been simplicity itself: find



New ALPS president Fred Zirkle seen with Marc Matoza (head of European operations) and board chairman Rick Warner.

good people, let them get on the job, and give them support. He was following this principle in ALPS.

Language Monthly talked by telephone a few days later to Fred Zirkle in Switzerland, at the end of his European tour. Mr Zirkle was enthusiastic about the response from large potential customers and from people with existing installations he had been visiting. ALPS, he said, had "purchase orders of substantial magnitude", and he hoped to be able to disclose some of the prestigious names involved later in the year. The trip had confirmed his conviction that there was a big market out there for the ALPS products.

ALPS had identified as its priority targets the multinational companies in the United States and Europe. The flexibility of the ALPS product makes it suitable for both a centralised corporate translation approach, as in Computervision and NCR, or a decentralised approach, such as that used by IBM and Hewlett-Packard in both Europe and Latin America.

But research carried out from Neuchatel by marketing director Mike Anobile, in the latter half of 1984, had identified a market extending beyond the multinationals. Mr Anobile's work had identified four "vertical sectors" on which to "home in": electronic data processing, motor vehicle manufacture, finance, and research and development. In Europe there are more people translating who are not professional translators, than there are professional translators.

Mr Zirkle said they also saw many educational applications for ALPS.

Asked about future products, Mr Zirkle said that a number of what he called "sprout products" were being worked upon. They included language enhancements, and such things as "grammar checkers", which could give a critique of the quality of English. There was a lot of interest in these in the United States, where there was perhaps a greater degree of sensitivity to the effect that letters might have on the recipient, and the need to conform to a company style. They already had one major customer wanting to take this programme in a software-packaged form.

ALPS was also under contract to develop translation programmes in non-European languages, in particular for Arabic, Chinese and Japanese.

"One of the tasks of the Neuchatel operation," he said, "is to specify user needs. ALPS developments are driven by user demand".