

Big Localizers, Small Globalizers

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These are turbulent times in the language professions.

Neither large "transcos" nor individual practitioners are immune.

Language professionals are living in decidedly interesting times, whether you see them through a top-down or bottom-up zoom. The forces of globalization are having a profound effect upon the business models that underlie a large part of the emerging localization industry. They are pushing a number of major players into a series of mergers and acquisitions that mirror the dynamics—and the dangers—of competition in most other sectors in the economy. In this issue, we report on some of the most recent events from the buy-out front and how the industry perceives their import.

The extraordinary growth of the World Wide Web is giving individual language-service practitioners unprecedented power to compete on a larger potential market. At the same time they can join in a grass-roots effort to create and maintain the sort of resources they really need on a global scale. We see this emerging in dictionary projects such as Logos's Living Dictionary or ongoing discussions about the design of appropriate terminology standards that can aid delivery via the Web.

These initiatives naturally raise hard questions about quality control and resource marketing. The conversation between the various parties involved (dictionary compilers, standards bodies, copyright owners and users) promises to be long and no doubt acrimonious. In this issue, we feature an evaluation of the proposed MARTIF term-exchange standard, as well as a profile of how one industrial language-services department is trying to leverage its own terminology stock.

Yet many individual translators or small transcos (a handy abbreviation for translation company) among our readers probably wonder if there is any real connection between big-buck maneuvers amongst the industry's behemoths and their own everyday struggle to survive in an increasingly cost-conscious business environment. How does top-down meet bottom-up? What can they learn from each other?

First, the globalization of the economy as a whole will almost certainly generate more business for language professionals the world over. Wherever there is a need for documentation, there will be a need for multilin-

gual information management—and that means technical communication and translation. Demand will presumably reach beyond internationalizing and localizing software products and cover every other sector in which information is a key component. The interesting question is whether the working models that have been developed for localizing in sectors such as software publishing, automotive, medical instrumentation, engineering and aerospace can be successfully applied to other document-intensive fields, such as the pharmaceutical industry, financial services, and complex cultural products.

Yet translators and small transcos will only be able to work to the just-in-time demands of these product cycles on condition that they plug in seamlessly to the larger workflow framework of their customers. So far this meant nothing more than sharing word-processing files and computer platforms or getting modems to work properly. Essential but solvable. As translation demand and supply become collectively wired into a common information-exchange infrastructure, these firms will have to learn to use more sophisticated tools, not only for multilingual document management but also for workflow management in general. We offer a foretaste of what this could mean in an interview with ETP's Fergus O'Connell who is due to bring out a new-generation project-management software in the autumn.

Perhaps the ultimate link between the global localizer and the individual language professional will lie in training. A common complaint from the captains of the localization industry is that university training in translating is usually ill-suited to their desiderata. They need computerate, project-oriented recruits who can express themselves easily in their target language in a user-friendly style. If the language services are to enter the third millennium on the crest of the wave, then there will be a need for further training, not simply in the basic skills of translation and terminology, but also in project management, project accounting (especially for the new generation of teleworkers), and workflow.



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Clients' just-in-time demands will require both translation companies and individual translators to plug in seamlessly into a larger workflow model.