

Interpro Translation Solutions celebrates 15 year anniversary

We interview CEO, Ralph Strozza

Ralph -

2009 was one of those “let’s see what’s going to happen years” in our industry, as it was with most industries, I assume. With what happened to the global financial markets in Q4 2008, I really don’t think anyone was sure about what was coming next. 2008 was Interpro’s best year ever, financially speaking, yet giving what was happening, my expectations for 2009 were not very high to say the least. However, we continued to win new clients, maintain market share with existing clients, and finish the year in a profitable position despite the increasingly competitive market and continuing pressure to lower prices. Obviously we will never go back to the pre RFI, RFP, RFQ days where clients made decisions based on face-to-face encounters and personal relationships. The game has changed. And as Dennis Barsema warns “Change or die”.

CSN-

Ralph, could you comment on the down market effect to localization in general as well as in your areas of specialization - both positively and negatively?

RALPH

Even in this depressed market, we are encouraged by the level of activity we are seeing with new clients, as well as a continued revenue stream from our existing clients. Companies are creating new markets for themselves by localizing their products into specific languages. In most cases, the cost of developing a new language version of an existing product is miniscule to the initial R&D costs of developing the initial product. The state of the economy has uncovered this unexpected windfall for those of us in the localization industry.

Some of the negatives that we are seeing in this economy are:

- Average project size (in terms of scope and overall dollar value) is smaller as client budgets have been

reduced and as confidence in the economy is still very untenable.

- Companies are taking longer to pay than in the past, a by-product of tight cash flow and difficult-to-get credit for many businesses.
- More and more, companies are sending out their projects to bid (RFI, RFQ, etc.). We have recently submitted our RFI response in the hopes of being selected to participate in this prospect’s RFP process! These impersonal and very time-consuming efforts make it very difficult for us to demonstrate value to our clients. This, when providing services which are considered a commodity, is extremely challenging and frequently does not bear fruit.

Probably the most positive aspect of this down market is that it forces you to do your SWOT analysis and to rethink your processes and methodologies. Having to do more with less and being forced to reduce prices in order to win business compels you to evaluate and implement technology which used to be viewed as “nice to haves” but which now are no longer optional.

CSN-

How has Interpro evolved it’s technology and business processes over the years.

RALPH –

Interpro was always a technologically-savvy, tools-oriented company. It comes from my background in computer-assisted translation and working with clients who had extremely high volumes of documentation that needed to be translated in ridiculously short timeframes. My first hire two weeks after Interpro opened for business was a Project Manager, and the second hire one week later was a software engineer. Our evolution has basically followed the advances in translation-memory technology. We standardized on Trados back in 1996 and are still a Trados shop. We will augment our tools repertoire with a TMS (to be decided) as well as with machine translation. And we will be going live with a translation-centric, workflow-based production management system that will provide

on-demand project status and automatic event notification. Finally, partially due to the demands of the market for lower and lower prices and partially because I have a lot of experience with it and understand how and where it can be effective, we will be seriously discussing with our partners how to best integrate machine translation into our services offering.

Our main objective in implementing this technology is to, simultaneously, make the business development staff's jobs much easier and less error-prone, to make the Production staff much more efficient, and ultimately to provide our clients with exceptional value at a sensible price. We want to be able to derive every possible competitive advantage we can through the use of the technology available to us on the market.

CSN-

What are some of the Key market indicators you are following now.

RALPH –

Since the lion's share of Interpro's revenue is derived from companies in North America who are expanding and servicing their clientele overseas, we are clearly interested in the volume of international business being conducted from the US and Canada out to Europe and Asia, primarily. And since our market niche is software localization, trends relative to the research and development spend is of great interest to us. Other than that, we of course follow the primary indicators that influence the

general temperature of the general public: Are markets up? Are they down? What are the latest unemployment numbers? Are more jobs being created than being lost?, etc. These barometers affect how organizations and people spend their money, and eventually it trickles down to us.

CSN-

What are your assumptions and predictions for 2010 and how does that play into your planning for the next 15 years.

RALPH –

The next 15 years from any point in time is hard to predict, Keith. The first 15 years for Interpro saw the dawn of the Internet, the coming-to-age of translation memory products, content management systems, translation management systems, and the emergence of machine translation. I believe the next 15 years will certainly see continued automation of the translation supply chain, with machine translation - fed by Google-rich databases culled from ever-growing multilingual content - as entrenched in the translator's repertoire of tools as translation memory technology is today. I also think we will see, after so many years of promise, that Artificial Intelligence will become a factor in language development. And unfortunately for language service providers, translation will continue to be viewed as a commodity and something that companies are not going to want to spend a lot of money on, even though their demands for quality and accelerated delivery will only increase.

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