A PROFESSIONAL BULLETIN BOARD FOR TRANSLATORS, AN ON-LINE MEMBERS DATABASE, A NEW STRUCTURE FOR PRINTED DIRECTORIES

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In this paper the author reports on:

* An operational, dedicated BBS for translators
* An operational, national translators and interpreters on-line database
* A future international translators and interpreters on-line database
* A new structure for printed members directories

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

Would you prefer to be treated for acute appendicitis by a doddery old faith healer with a wooden mallet for an anaesthetic - or a competent surgeon with a sharper-than-sharp ceramic scalpel and an expert anaesthesiologist?

You are probably thinking that this is a somewhat rhetorical question - wrongly so, as I intend to demonstrate.

It is my belief that, in 1992, any self-respecting translator without a personal computer and *both* a modem *and* access to a Bulletin Board System can be likened to the doddery old faith healer I mentioned just now. I hope, when I have finished this address, that you will think so too.

But please allow me to introduce myself briefly following this somewhat contentious statement. You will have probably seen my name on today's programme. I should add that I am an Austrian living in Utrecht, the Netherlands, since 1972 and have been self-employed since 1985, mainly as a translator, with a considerable workload.

My presence here was "precipitated" by my activities connected with the Dutch bulletin board system, both for the NGV - the Dutch Translators' Association -, and for the FIT.

Allow me to start in earnest and present a list of contents for this address:

1   What is a Bulletin Board System and what can it do?
2   What are the advantages and disadvantages of a BBS?
3   Why not have as many individual mini-BBSs as there are

translators?
4   What exactly is an on-line method of searching for translators?
5   What kind of hardware and software do you need?
6   Is it expensive?
7   The chicken, the egg and the FIT
8   A new version of the translators directory
9   Demonstration of the NGVGIDS / NGVBBS and final questions

1.   What is a Bulletin Board System and what can it do?

A BBS is a fairly large central computer with numerous entries and exits via telephone, telex, telefax, and public data-network lines. A good comparison would be to a - partially open - marketplace. This computer can be accessed from anywhere on the earth, day and night, by a personal computer, a modem and a telephone, or even by earphone or satellite phone.

Although you will all be familiar with the personal computer, might I very briefly explain the function of a modem? A modem translates the digital signals from a computer into the acoustic signal that a telephone line is capable of transmitting. Another modem is located at the other end of the line, linked to a personal computer. The other modem translates the acoustic signals back into digital signals.

The marketplace I mentioned just now contains a "post office" with "post-boxes" for your electronic mail of any shape and size, as well as various public and restricted bulletin boards with hundreds or even thousands of questions, notices and messages, a "library" with such facilities as dictionaries - like Eurodicautom - and word lists, and finally a "supermarket" with tens of thousands of computer programs that the customers are free to copy as they wish. Streets full of traffic lead into and off the market place - in both directions. Streets like "Telex road", "Faxlane", and "Telecom Gold avenue".

2.   What are the advantages and disadvantages of a BBS?

The advantages are accessibility at every hour of the day, the large number of lines, the hardware and software that are always up-to-date, the astonishing speed, the high level of security, the unlimited length of files that can be transmitted, and the very low cost.

An example: it is possible to transfer 50 pages of A4, created in Word for Macintosh or WordPerfect for Windows or

any other program, without any error whatsoever in less than 3.5 minutes as private mail to 1, 2, 3 or even up to a maximum of 100 people simultaneously. Each addressee is called by the computer approx. 8 seconds later, and a lady, whose voice has been immortalised in a chip, will inform him or her that a private message has arrived. In turn, the addressee, now uses his/her personal computer and modem to call the BBS and collect the file, again within 3.5 minutes.

Within the Netherlands, the total cost of the activities set out in this example will amount to 40 pence during the day, and 30 pence in the evening or at weekends. The charge for the same document but from the United Kingdom to the Netherlands would be no more than approx. 1.20 (sterling).

How much would the conventional postal service cost?
Or how much does a courier cost?
And how long does it take for them to arrive?
And are they able to provide this service to 100 addresses simultaneously within 3.5 minutes with perfection?
And how long does it take you to format a diskette to contain the very same file, make your copies, write the envelope, package the goods and take it to the post office for dispatching where you'll have to cue for 15 minutes to buy the necessary stamps?

Conventional postal services or couriers - you might consider them to be the wagoners supporting the faith healers from the first sentence of my address.

Disadvantages of a BBS: There aren't any, unless you can think of one now.

3. Why not have as many individual mini-BBSs as there are translators?

Because, like me, you are probably used to having a translation you want to send to a colleague or client in the early hours of the morning, but whose computer is not switched on and who is probably on holiday anyway.

But even if it's light outside, both translators are at home and both their personal computers and modems are switched on - even then: I would need to know the modem numbers of everybody I wish to communicate with by modem, I would need to know all the passwords and whether they may only be entered in upper- or lower case, know my user names, that are very likely to vary from one system to another, the distinct transmission and reception protocols and, what is more, I would also have to call the colleague beforehand to ask him or her to set their computer to receive the file. This will prevent them from continuing with their work, always work inadequately, and frustrate both parties. So there you have it.

4. <u>What exactly is an on-line method of searching for
    translators?</u>

In the Netherlands I have set up a very user-friendly
retrieval system for the linguistic layperson, in other words,
for customers or clients who are looking for a suitable
translator for a particular document or even an interpreter.
The system is freely available via the Dutch and Belgian
videotex system. And since the national videotext networks in
Europe are working hard to link their various systems, with
all probability, international access will be possible for
everybody in the future.

You might visualise our data bank as a multi-stage filter
system that the client uses to display a list of names and
complete data on translators or interpreters on his or her
screen via a simple set of questions and answers. The system
also offers information on rates (which is presently still
legal in the Netherlands), seven screens containing an
explanation on the search procedure and a screen with details
on the NGV. The system contains 1,100 members and opens out
into 54 source languages, 54 target languages, 26 main
disciplines, sworn and unsworn translators, as well as
individual interpreters, courtroom interpreters and congress
interpreters.

The data are not available on disk for reasons of legally
required data protection and because they are updated
regularly and therefore become outdated fairly rapidly. The
on-line version is updated roughly every six weeks. I do have
a demo diskette here with me if anybody is interested.

5   <u>What kind of hardware and software do you need?</u>

Hardly anything: a conventional personal computer, a
modem - preferably external - (approx. 30.= sterling) and
software. In principle, the latter (i.e. the software) is
free, although the user is expected to make a contribution of
approx. 10.=. Also useful is a manual such as the one produced
by the NGV that was written by yours truly (in Dutch, 100
pages A4) and that can be ordered from the NGV office at cost
price.

For example, there are three translators in Belgium who
have access to the NGVBBS, and there is one in Japan. They
make use of both the telephone network and the Belgium and
Japanese public data-networks as their means of communication.
The NGVBBS is accessible to all the members of all the
organisations that are, in turn, members of the FIT.

6.   Is it expensive?

Of course not, as you will have seen from the figures I presented just a few minutes ago. The NGVBBS in Amsterdam costs no more than 1.50 sterling per month plus approx. 4 pence per minute when you are on-line. Fees are covered by way of an advance payment of approx. 35.= sterling (including Dutch VAT) that is subtracted from the minutes you are on-line in real-time. One method of payment is by means of a credit card. A balance of 35.= will cover many months' system time.

7.   The chicken, the egg and the FIT

If every translator and every client had a modem, the marketplace would already be working at optimum efficiency at this moment. However, we're not quite that far just yet, because the faith healers and wagoners are found in both groups. There are very few forms of technology that I know that are so simple and effective as communication with a modem, but where the gap between availability and actual use is so big. All I can do - and what you will be able to do after my address - is to spread the word, emphasizing the incredible savings in the form of time and productivity, time and again. Consider, for example, the distribution of a large translation job over a team of translators, the simultaneous distribution of the customer' prescribed word lists by a translation company to that team and the independence of each team member in terms of time and location.

Modern companies have been using EDI - Electronic Data Interchange - for many years for standardised order processing, invoicing, customs procedures, and the like. Electronic mail is the counterpart of EDI for - among other things - the world of the translator. For your part, you can participate to avoid missing the boat and to subsequently convince everyone else that the best thing they can do is to also find a stall on that same marketplace. It might sometimes require you to moan at your clients or colleagues for months on end, but if they are to survive, the translation companies must be the first to recognise the importance or will recognise this fairly shortly. And you as translators will also want to survive, so you will also have to make the step eventually.

Anybody who still sends floppy disks or, worse still, paper through the post in 1992, is, in technological terms, a faith healer with a leeway of about 10 years. The first modems came onto the market in about 1981.

As chairman of the FIT Commission for New Technologies during 1990-1993, I am doing my very utmost to set up a collective, global communications network for translators and to set up a common, international and public on-line database

of translators and interpreters. I should very much appreciate it if you were to relay the idea of such a system to your members. Information material is available on request in the form of a very extensive demo diskette containing, among other things, model databases.

Licences for the NGVGIDS, as the retrieval system is called, are available from the NGV at cost price.

8   A new version of the translators directory

In the light of my activities connected with the NGVBBS and the on-line NGVGIDS, in 1991, the NGV committee requested that I devise a new form and structure for the translators directory. I am convinced that the structure that has since evolved is a very practical model for any translators organisation. Licences are also available from the NGV for the associated program that was especially developed with the directory in mind. But for clarity's sake, I should add that I receive no personal remuneration for any of these activities or from the sale of any of the licences mentioned during this address.

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                              MAIN MENU
                              =========

Please choose:
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E)xtra information about searching in this database (7 screens)

S)earch for a translator or interpreter

P)ersonal data of an NGV member whose surname you already know

R)ates for translations and interpretation services

A)ddress of the NGV offices

Q)uit

(-) Back to previous menu (choice of dialogue language)


Your choice (E/S/P/R/A/Q/-):
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Member          7  of          15   Source:  TSJE      Target:   NEDE
---------------------------------------------------------------------
dhr.  A.B.  MACEL
Drogersdijk 98              2584 SZ  Den Haag                 Nederland
Tel: 070-3585481           Fax: 070-3584675

Source(s): NEDE*vg--  DUIT*vg--  ENGE*vg--  TSJE*vg--  RUSS-v---
Target(s): NEDE*vg--  DUIT*vg--  ENGE*vg--  TSJE*vg--
           * = sworn translator    v = translator
           g = general interpr.    r = court interpr.    t = assembly interpr.
Has PC:    Yes             Has modem:    No      Member: NGV 8DUe
Electronic mail address 1: NEABBS 020-5733513 "Ton Macel"
Electronic mail address 2: (Nog) geen / (Not) yet

SUBJECT FIELDS:
engineering, general                  mechanical industry, general
metal industry                        economics, general
computer technology                   law and legislation
---------------------------------------------------------------------

N)ext member    P)revious member    M)ain menu    Q)uit    (-) Back
Your choice (N/P/M/Q/-):
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RATES for technical-scientific translations per word / per hour, in Guilders:

Group 1: 0.325 / 108,-      Group 2: 0.40 / 133,-      Group 3: 0.50 / 167,-
Group 5: 0.525 / 175,-      Group 5: 0.60 / 200,-      Group 6: 0.72 / 240,-
----------------------------------------------------------------------------
GROUP 1: English, French, German
GROUP 2: Afrikaans, Catalan, Italian, Spanish
GROUP 3: Danish, Norwegian, Portuguese, Swedish
GROUP 4: Bulgarian, Czech, Esperanto, Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, Icelandic,
         Indonesian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Papiamento, Polish, Rumanian,
         Russian, Serbo-Croat, Slovak, Slovenian, Sranan, Ukrainian
GROUP 5: Arabic, Greek (ancient+modern), Hebrew (ancient+modern), Latin,
         Moroccan, Turkish
GROUP 6: Armenian, Chinese, Dari, Gurmukhi, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish,
         Multani, Persian/Farsi, Punjabi, Swahili, Twi/Dinka, Urdu,
         Vietnamese
----------------------------------------------------------------------------
Minimum: 65,-    Sworn: +0.10/word    Rush: +50%    Night/Weekend: +100%    +VAT

E)xtra info about searching (7 screens)    S)earch translator/interpreter
A)ddress of the NGV offices                M)ain menu              Q)uit
Your choice (E/S/A/M/Q):
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