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Feature Article

AND THEY SHALL NO LONGER REMAIN NAMELESS

by Jost Zetzsche

When Emilio Benito, the founder and long-time head developer of the translation productivity tool Déjà Vu, died at the beginning of this year, there was a tremendous public outpouring of grief and sympathy (see an example at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/dejavu-l/messages/45758?viscount=100>).

This comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with Emilio's longing for the perfect product and his passion for his user group. Emilio was exceptional. The real surprise is how Emilio's name recognition contrasts with that of most others in our industry. There are many outstanding developers, project managers, translation company owners, and translators out there, and yet the vast majority remain nameless throughout their lives.

Last month, I attended the funeral of Scott Smith, one of the leading managers of a translation provider in Houston, Texas. It was a large funeral because Scott had touched many lives, but only a small handful of clients and translators he had worked with over the years were present.

It's senseless to compare Scott's and Emilio's careers. The real point is that Scott did what most of us in this industry do -- an outstanding job, but for the most part anonymously, hidden behind the words we produce.

We would do ourselves a great favor by stepping out of the anonymity of "the service provider" and revealing ourselves as real people. This could come in many ways: actively participating in industry-related associations, publications, and events; presenting a much more personalized portrayal of our companies on websites and brochures; or simply building meaningful and memorable relationships with our vendors, partners, and clients.

We're all aware that the people involved in the translation process are the only guarantors for a project's many degrees of success or failure. Machine translation, a term most of us abhor, will undoubtedly become more relevant in the future; indeed, translation may one day become a nameless process. But we're not there yet. Stepping out from our cloak of anonymity not only carries the potential of curbing the impersonal nature of the client - provider relationship, but it will also ultimately make us more successful as our clients begin to recognize and value our work by the name that stands behind it.