



## GeekSpeak

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### With All Due Respect

The GeekSpeak column has two goals: to inform the community about technological advances and at the same time encourage the use and appreciation of technology among translation professionals. Jost also publishes a free technical newsletter for translators ([www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit](http://www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit)).

**In my last column,** I wrote about relationships and their supreme importance in our industry, especially in regard to translation technology. Give me a few more minutes of your time to talk about one more aspect of relationships that I think we all too often ignore.

Twenty years ago, our jobs embraced a different set of challenges, but they were certainly clear cut. We received documents by mail or fax, typed the translation while consulting our dictionaries and other paper-based resources, and then sent it back. While just thinking of that tedious process makes me shudder today, there is also a certain quaint sense of nostalgia about it (the St.-Jerome-in-his-study-with-a-skull-on-his-desk-and-a-quill-in-his-hand nostalgia).

Today, things are different in so many ways—from the transfer process to the resource lookup and research process to the immediacy of the whole experience, and, of course, the environment in which we work. It is beside the point whether it is better or not. The fact is, it is much more complex, and it is a complexity for which many of us are ill prepared.

Here is my point. Though we are already engaged in helping each other in some ways, there are many more possibilities of which we are not taking advantage.

Let's first look at the ways in which we are already helping each other. Freelance translators have a great multitude of subject-specific online discussion groups (many on sites like Yahoo! Groups or TranslatorsCafe.com). The number of opportunities through social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook is increasing. Of course, there are the physical get-togethers and conferences that organizations

like ATA and its many chapters provide. Likewise, for the agency owner there is a similar slew of possibilities, though it might be slightly more institutionalized (through organizations like the Globalization and Localization Association, Association of Language Companies, and ATA's Translation Company Division). These are fantastic support opportunities, and I can only hope that they will continue and become ever stronger.

What you might have noticed about the above list is that there is little mention of help between freelancers and language services providers (LSPs). This is an area where I think there could be much improvement. Let me explain.

If your day-to-day work is anything like mine, you do not work in one single work environment, but in many different ones. In fact, sometimes I use many different environments throughout just one day. I am not talking about e-mail versus word processing versus researching and browsing on the Internet (that's all a given), but about the many different translation environment tools (TEntTs) with which we have to deal. With the advent of online-based translation memories and terminology databases and a greater diversification of the tool market, we often cannot work in that one environment of our choice, but must adapt to our clients' preferences.

We also need to consider data sources. There is now a plethora of client- and subject-specific data sources online. Some of these are well known and readily accessible, but some are not—even though they might very well contain all the necessary data that we need to use for our project at hand. But how do we access these when we might need some in-depth knowledge on how to align quickly

hundreds of Web documents or manipulate URLs between different language editions of the client's website?

All of this asks a lot of us freelancers—at the very least flexibility and a willingness to learn new things—but I think that this should ask a lot of LSPs as well: a willingness to offer intelligent training or instructions to avoid leaving the burden solely on the shoulders of the contracting freelancer. (And, yes, this means that freelance translators actually have to be willing to participate in these trainings or read the instructions. As an encouragement, some kind of reimbursement might help, especially if it is a skill that pertains only to that particular LSP and/or project.)

But, what goes around has to come around, and I believe that the same willingness to share experience needs to be something that freelancers should be open to passing on to their LSP clients (or direct clients for that matter).

Too many of us know how woefully untechnical some project managers are, and it should not and cannot be "beneath our dignity" to offer some help. (Of course, it should also not be beyond the dignity of the project manager to accept the help that is offered.) Not only is this the right thing to do, but it also makes a lot of business sense. By doing so we strengthen relationships and therefore future business opportunities, we make our own lives easier by receiving projects and files in a more easily workable manner, and in some instances we might be able to charge for consulting—or at least use it to launch a more formal, paid consulting relationship.

Of course, the basis for any of this lies in mutual respect for each other—and we all know that this is something we can work to improve.

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