## GeekSpeak | Jost Zetzsche

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### Technology with a Human Face

**This year, when** the Easter celebrations of the Western and Eastern Orthodox Christian churches and the Jewish Passover all fall on the same date as the writing of this column, what better message to give than one of peace and reconciliation? And since these terms taste a little big for my mouth, let me start with one that is basic to both of them: relationship.

In a column about technology and translation? Bear with me.

In my conversations at the recent and very successful ATA Translation Company Division conference in Scottsdale, Arizona, just about everything seemed to center on relationships, an aspect that we seem to forget about often. The most basic question that was raised repeatedly was: What is the true nature of the language business, and what do we truly have (to offer)? Sure, the obvious answers are language and (hopefully) subject matter expertise. But those alone do not make a business.

Think about it.

No matter who you are in our industry—freelance translator, language services provider (LSP), owner/employee, or translation buyer—our business is only possible because of the relationships we have created and maintain: relationships with our clients (this is the obvious one), but also with our peers and, for an LSP, vendors. Aside from those two things—skills and relationships—we are really not made of much more. Yes, we may own some equipment and have access to technology and data, but those are meaningless without the other two.

To me, the profound can often be found in the simplest of concepts, and this is one such case. Granted, relationships are not easy, and we all know that. Each of us can tell of conflicts with representatives of the other groups within our industry and even within the groups. But strength lies in unity, not division, especially if, like most of us, you are not large enough to simply forego relationships on all of the levels just mentioned.

Are some groups large enough to do this? I do not really think so, but I am worried about some very large LSPs that are attempting to create self-contained, technological infrastructures (I told you I would get there eventually) for which even freelance translators have to pay, and only work for that LSP. In general, infrastructures are good—if they become like freeways on which everyone can travel with the same benefit and the same speed. What I worry about is the self-contained nature of systems like Lionbridge's GeoWorkz Translation Workspace and, to some degree, SDL's Trados Studio.

Technology is not good for technology's sake alone; technology is good when it is useful and when it has the same potential for all who employ it. If it is in the hands of one large contender in the business that technology is supposed to serve, it runs the danger of not having the same benefit for all.

Technology with a human face—the title of this column—is technology that honors and values relationships of equals. In my eyes, this is only possible with a large and colorful variety of technology solutions that are interconnectable through standards that allow for a complete data exchange.

Let's try to strive for technology with a human face or, as this cleverly written blog entry (http://bit.ly/LudditeLove) suggests, some of that old-time Luddite love.

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