

Crowdin

Crowdin (<https://crowdin.com>) has undergone tremendous change over the years. It has evolved into a company with 65 full-time employees and the focus of its tool has completely shifted.

Crowdin is the cloud-based localization management tool that first appeared during the heyday of translation crowdsourcing and offered an inexpensive way to have files in software development formats translated by, well, everyone. The data owners could either invite specific users or open up their projects to the public.

Once Crowdin gained traction, Serhiy Dmytryshyn, Crowdin's chief executive officer, and his team realized that it was a difficult sales proposition to provide access to free translation services via crowdsourcing but then charge for the technology to do that. (Sometimes the minds of translation

buyers work in strange and mysterious ways.) They also realized that the folks who were drawn to their tool were not the typical translation managers, but software developers who recognized a kindred spirit behind Crowdin and found good support for all their file formats in a tool that translators liked.


Also at that time, the idea of agile development had already firmly taken hold in the software development world, calling for a continuous localization process rather than the crazy localization rush after the product development was essentially finished. So, Serhiy and his team moved away from the job-based approach (e.g., creating "jobs" for one or several files that would be sent out to a specific translator) and optimized Crowdin for those kinds of continuous, often micro-task-based workflows. At that point, they also had a number of partnerships with service providers with whom they could connect their clients. Since their clients were not the typical translation managers who had a pretty good handle on what service vendors to work with, this was a welcome addition for their clients.

At some point it then became clear that the agile, "non-job" approach to software development

localization could and should work just as well for other kinds of content, particularly content that sits in various content management systems. The 200 different connectors developed for that purpose, plus advanced workflow systems, invoicing, etc., was the idea behind the Crowdin Enterprise offering, which has been a well-liked tool for large and large-ish companies.

Now, there's one more chapter to all of this. The very latest development is that Crowdin has just started offering its own translation and project management services. Why? Well, Serhiy said one reason is that their clients were not very adept at vendor selection and tended to have disappointing results with the final product. Plus, for some, especially the ones who had no previous experience with translation, vendor selection seemed burdensome. And since we all know there's a lot more money in translation services than translation technology, it seemed like a no-brainer to offer that. (Serhiy actually didn't say that last part and probably wouldn't have because he wants to: a) continue his ongoing relationships with other vendors, and b) in his mind, Crowdin is still a software company rather than a service provider.)

Here's what I like about Crowdin's story. They came up with a good idea geared toward its time, but then they took their users' lead to shape the tool according to what was needed. And amazingly enough, the users weren't the typical translation buyers and translation technology users but developers themselves, who eventually also brought documentation and marketing teams into the fold. So, the tool could once again develop to satisfy those needs as well.

By the way, all this is not to say that the old crowdsourcing has fallen completely away. Certain open-source and gaming applications still use the crowdsourcing feature. According to Serhiy, Minecraft, for instance, draws on 30,000 volunteers who typically take 20 minutes to translate anything that comes through the pipeline into 150 languages. 



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This column has two goals: to inform the community about technological advances and encourage the use and appreciation of technology among translation professionals.

