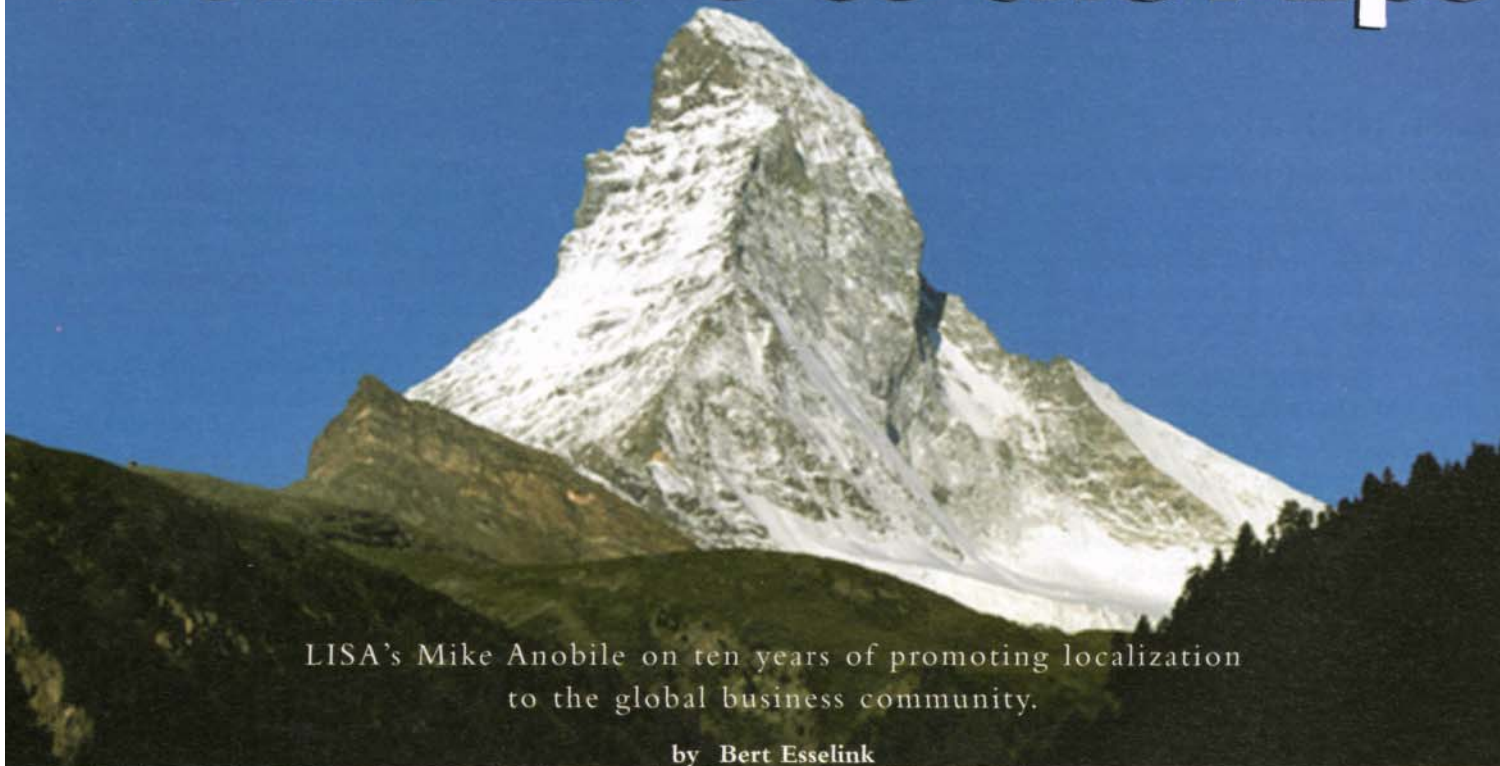


From ALPS to the Alps



LISA's Mike Anobile on ten years of promoting localization to the global business community.

by Bert Esselink

In December 2000, at the LISA Forum in Amsterdam, the Localisation Industry Standards Association celebrated its tenth anniversary. Language International recently met up with LISA's founder and director Mike Anobile to discuss the changing role of his association in a time where product *localization* is quickly migrating to business *globalization*.

LI: Can you describe the contents of your CV in four sentences?

MA: I came to Geneva, Switzerland in 1980 as part of the Exxon Office Systems management group to establish their International Headquarters, and later left Exxon to become the International Marketing Manager for Automated Language Processing Systems (ALPS), now known as ALPNET. After ALPNET decided to get out of the translation software business, the Managing Director of the original company and I purchased their product, "MacProof", and formed *L'Expertise*, a software company targeting the multilingual grammar and style checking market. Two years later I began a consulting company working in the language industry. In 1990, with a number of clients, the INK

Roundtable was formed and in just under 18 months it became known as the Localisation Industry Standards Association.

LI: How did you get into the localization business?

MA: Back in my Exxon days I got my first taste of the need for globalized products when we began shipping fax and word processing products outside of the United States. I remember trying to convince the

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Engineering department that we needed to make modifications for European A4 paper sizes! When I became responsible for European and Asian marketing training operations, product localization and docu-

mentation were issues that had to be resolved to gain local buy-in and support. This required me to work closely with in-country distributors to translate our product and training documentation. So out of necessity, I also began working with our word processor development group to facilitate the internationalization of products so that the user interface and customer support issues could be properly addressed.

LI: What is your typical day like?

MA: I wake up at dawn to have, what I call, my energy drink, but what my kids call "green slime." It is not nearly as bad as it sounds (or looks), it's a specially concocted healthy brew filled with herbs and vitamins. At 7:15 am my wife and I bring our youngest daughter to the school-bus stop in the next village, then we jog along the lake on a *parcours vita*, breathing the air and enjoying the pristine view of the Swiss Alps and Lake Geneva. Afterwards I return home and enter my office, which is right next door, and never see daylight again...

LI: Please describe LISA's charter, history, and achievements.

MA: LISA's mission is to promote localization to the global business community, while fostering the development of standards like OSCAR (TMX-TBX) and cataloging and disseminating information on best practices, like quality assurance. Our initiatives deal with a wide variety of issues from terminology to Web localization and are the subject of our Executive Roundtables and quarterly international forums. LISA began by holding meetings with 15-20 top executives in the localization industry. Now a decade later, we hold events with more than 300 industry participants who come together to network and exchange ideas on both technical, marketing and most recently, growth, expansion, and investment issues. We have just reinitiated the smaller roundtable format to give industry leaders the opportunity to work with facilitators from consulting groups like McKinsey, KPMG, and NextEra, to address the problems of managing growth in a global environment.

Our successes have been significant, the most vital being our ability to sustain our operation and grow in an increasingly competitive environment. Our business sector is very young and as a result, has not yet seen the wisdom of uniting behind an industry trade organization to reach mutual goals. More mature industry groups like the Software and Information Industry Association (SIIA), American Information and Image Management (AIIM), and the American Translators Association (ATA) have realized that by coming together to address important issues like training, legislation, and intellectual property, they have a stronger voice and can learn from each others' solutions to common problems.

LI: Who are the people behind LISA?

MA: Our founding members played a substantial role in forming LISA and helping it become the preeminent association in the industry today. We have been privileged to have, at the Board level, industry leaders like Henri Broekmate and Roger Jeanty of Lionbridge, and Philippe de St. Maresville of Hewlett Packard, Henning Bургessen formerly of IBM, Kate McKnight formerly of Digital and now with VeriTest, Michael O'Callaghan of Oracle, Renato Beninato of ALPNET and Ann Fitzpatrick of Sun, to just name a few of the many who worked so hard to bring the association to the forefront of the international business community.

At the administrative level, Ilse Zemp started with LISA at its formal registration in Switzerland in 1992 as our part-time accountant and her role has expanded considerably since then. Alison Rowles started with us in 1994 as a Business Consultant and was responsible for implementing all of the back office systems. In 1998 she was hired by the Board to be our LISA Controller and Business Manager; today Alison's company SMP Marketing, is responsible for much of our third party content and strategic business alliances. She also manages the LISA Web site and our marketing efforts. Corinne Anthamatten, who has been with us since 1997, has done a great job managing our international forums and workshops, and Mary Donadini has recently joined us as our Office Manager, helping us to consolidate our back office and online processing systems. Jean-Marc Chaubert was recently hired from BDO Visura as our part-time Controller.

Through last year's restructuring mandate, Advisory Executive Committee members like E. Smith Yewell of Welocalize.com, Donald DePalma of Idiom, Jordan Woods of GlobalSight, Renne Sztabelski of HiText, Kara Warburton of IBM, Maarten Milder of Bowne Global Solutions, Dr. Alan Melby of Brigham Young University, and Rose Lockwood of Berlitz GlobalNET are also playing an active role. The Supervisory members, Jaap van der Meer of ALPNET and John Egan of TRADOS are responsible for the financial supervision and support of the strategic direction of the organization.

LI: Is LISA a commercial organization or non-profit?

MA: LISA is a registered non-profit organization (NPO) in Switzerland. However, in order to be a successful NPO today, you have to run your association as a commercial business. Fortunately, we have done that from the onset. The *Harvard Business*

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Review and the *Wall Street Journal* have recently written about how dot.orgs are becoming a role model for many start-ups



to gain momentum. In the past, NPOs have largely been headed by educators and other non-commercial personnel, whereas LISA has always been managed as a profit-driven entity, which has given us the ability to fund our various programs. Roger Jeanty used to describe our model as a combination of "fish and fowl". Given the fact that LISA was never funded by any government or private entity, we have always struggled, as most enterprises do, to maintain our existence and grow. Right now with the industry downturn, we are back to where we were before the boom—looking for creative ways to leverage member involvement to generate promotion and growth since LISA has never been neither publicly nor privately funded.

Since we could not sustain a large in-house operation, we've been operating under an outsourcing model for years, which has allowed us to make a more dramatic shift towards a completely outsourced operation by consigning our marketing, newsletter, and most all of our promotional activities to third parties, which will eventually make the association more portable. Brandon & Associates in Washington DC, handles most of our public affairs and content management programs with third party conference organizations and other US-based professional associations. SMP Marketing, in Switzerland, manages our worldwide public relations and web activities, and liaises with international publications and press groups to promote the industry and LISA members.

LI: What events does LISA organize?

MA: For the past 10 years LISA has organized International Forums, and the LISA Global Strategies Summits, alternately between the US, Europe, Asia and emerging market areas. We also organize training

workshops through our members and professional organizations. We are increasingly partnering with other trade and professional associations, as well as dedicated conference organizations, to feature local-

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ization and enterprise globalization content in their programs.

LI: Who chooses the locations for the forums?

MA: For the most part sponsoring members do. However, after ten years in this business, we have also gained some skill at choosing venues where we know we can attract the greatest attendance, open new markets, and meet the requirements for publicity and exposure for our sponsors as well as the objectives of the association.

LI: What are the biggest advantages of being a LISA member?

MA: Well there are many. This is the most cost-effective membership for attending training workshops and international forums, to our media publications and discounted promotions. The fact of the matter is that LISA companies are at the forefront of the localization business in terms of technology, workflow, and recognized best practice. Members have the frequent opportunity to not only network with other people in the industry, but also share intricate problems and work together to solve them both formally and informally.

More importantly, what is most unique and one of the most valuable aspects of LISA membership is the rare chance for professionals to significantly contribute to the growth of a new industry by sharing and exchanging knowledge that will ultimately improve global business.

LI: What is the largest revenue generator for LISA?

MA: Forums have been in the past, but the economy this year may shift us back to an earlier model where membership fees provided the majority of revenue.

LI: What has been the biggest challenge in establishing and running LISA?

MA: Getting member buy-in. An association is only as strong as its members who are willing to play an active role. Creating the synergy to continually make this happen has always been a challenge. We know that all members have jobs to do for their company and they need to concentrate on accomplishing their corporate goals, so LISA offers them an opportunity to also focus on building an industry that is very immature and turbulent, yet rapidly growing.

LI: What is your take on the recent negative press on LISA, for example in *Multilingual*?

MA: As far as I know, *Multilingual* is the only negative press we have ever received, and I find it very strange that they quote criticism from people who are neither members nor have attended a LISA event. LISA has always had an excellent relationship with the international business press. We hold regular media advisories and press conferences at our forums; and publications like the *Wall Street Journal*, *Asia Business*, *eCFO*, and *Business2.0*, among others, regularly consult us for industry contacts and content. We position our members and their expertise to the benefit of the media, the association and the industry. Much of this activity is the result of our "member spokesperson program" which is spearheaded by Brandon & Asso-

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ciates and managed in Europe and Asia by SMP.

LI: How do you explain the fact that most LISA members are vendors, not publishers?

MA: Vendors understand that LISA represents high value in terms of networking with buyers, getting connected into the international business press, and having a first hand opportunity to share their expertise on public platforms; and far less expensively than they can in most places. It's also a natural consequence of an industry where demand by far exceeds supply. The IT client sector, which in the early days spent the most money in product localization, downsized their op-

erations and helped upgrade the level of professionalism on the services side of the business. Couple this with the recent industry consolidation and it's only natural that you would find more vendors seeking entry into LISA as well as wanting to network at LISA events.

In the early days, LISA vendors used to bring their clients to LISA forums as a means of educating them and sharing experiences that were being faced by all. Aggressive sales tactics by some LISA members have caused others to stop this practice resulting in a lose-lose situation for everyone concerned. Unfortunately for the association, vendors complain that not enough clients attend and clients complain that they are sick of being hassled by so many vendors. We have tried to resolve this impasse by creating links to other organizations where our vendor community can participate in panels and exhibit at conferences catering to vertical business sectors.

We are actively recruiting new client members from these same groups who wish to use LISA and its activities to educate their staff members to the best practices of localization. Our forum structure is being geared to meet these requirements. Hopefully the wisdom of these programs and the dedicated member expansion efforts being implemented by the administration and the Executive Committee, will result in better cooperation among vendor members, and with the new programs in process to attract clients, we should again achieve a more equal balance in the near-term.

LI: What are the main differences between the localization industry today versus a decade ago?

MA: I'd say there are two important differences, one being the evolution of a product distribution and services focus, to executing global business via the Internet. Another important shift is seen in the fact that companies are realizing that being global is not just about translation or technology. The strategic and implementation issues involved are considerable. As more clients understand this, they come to recognize the value and importance that the consulting service of this industry has to offer.

LI: How will the localization industry evolve, and what will LISA's role be in this?

MA: Technology and process automation will drive the business, there's no other way for the demand to be met. LISA will become a more widely known trade association and standards group, as its numbers

increase and as more and more businesses understand how enterprise globalization is the common denominator for successful international business. The industry will begin to mature and cooperate more actively, and cooperation will replace competition. This is where LISA can more effectively position legal, financial, investment, and industry promotion on a collective basis.

LI: Do you feel that LISA has more competition now than in the beginning of its existence?

MA: Today everybody; conference groups, trade associations, and even student organizations are starting their own globalization or localization associations and interest groups. It's great! It underscores the importance that localization plays in today's business, and the industry is only beginning to take off. In my opinion, the more that localization is featured in conferences, online chat groups, and various publications, the more it works to the advantage of everyone's best interest.

Naturally, we want to cooperate with local or regional initiatives, but we also want to maintain LISA's role as the preeminent trade association. Needless to say, any association is only as strong as its membership,

and those members are responsible for the association's growth.

LI: When will you feel you have accomplished all your goals with LISA?

MA: When we have 3,000 members, both corporate and industry professionals, and I am confident that we can achieve that goal within the next 5 years.

LI: What is your favorite anecdote after ten years of LISA, traveling across the world to the forums?

MA: LISA has a long established tradition of a communal meal with cultural activities geared to local customs at every forum venue, and we've been in over 20 countries. This practice has resulted in a Chinese opera in Beijing, a black-tie event at the Casino in Madrid, the famous Ethnographic museum in Budapest, to beach parties in California and ongoing exposure to nightlife in the world's major cities, including castles in Europe and fireworks exploding over oriental gardens in Shanghai. We have always asked our constituents to respect the customs of our country hosts. However at one LISA banquet, a senior executive next to me politely tapped me on the shoulder to say, "Michael, I know how important it is to honor our hosts, but am I really expected

to eat this giant bug on my plate?" Unfortunately this time, it was not part of the exotic local cuisine, but an uninvited guest.

LI: What is the last book you read?

MA: Neil Stephenson's *Snow Crash*. The book is about how a 5,000 year-old neurological virus becomes encoded into the human brain and the Internet to take over the world. It's really an exciting story, but I won't tell you how it ends.

LI: What is your favorite Web site and why?

MA: Ask Jeeves! I'm always sure to get the answers I want, unlike those I sometimes get from my family or friends.

We wish to thank Mike Anobile for his time and comprehensive answers. For more information on LISA and upcoming LISA events, visit www.lisa.org.