

MT Labs, Inc.

MicroPak lives on.

"The launch of Bravice's MICROPAK nearly ten years ago made a big splash in Japan." recalls Akira Matsuo, president of MT Laboratories and ex-Bravice employee. "It was headline news in the *Asahi Times*." The pc-based, Japanese-English package went on to become the best selling translation system in Japan, with upwards of five thousand packages in circulation. Bravice later went on to acquire Weidner Communications, Provo's other MT company, in 1984, publishing its Microcat system as Euro-Pak. In 1991, Bravice rather suddenly went bankrupt and seemed to disappear without a trace.

However, Matsuo, together with fellow Bravice ex-employees Naoyuki Akiyama and Kazunori Nishimura, resurfaced. They recamped and established MT Laboratories in April of last year, buying the rights to the Bravice software. While MT Labs focuses on development activities, another company, Pacific Eye, has been established by another ex-Bravice employee and is responsible for marketing and end-user support. Last October, MT Labs brought out an upgrade, Bravice J/E version 5 and Matsuo says sales are running at eight to ten packages a month for the ¥485,000 package. He adds that some four-hundred users of earlier Bravice versions paid ¥50,000 to upgrade to version 5. As well as being an obvious source of much-needed income for the young company, this is also a useful indication of how much the package is actually being used. MT Labs offers thirty-one specialist lexicons for a variety of technical fields to enhance the J/E V's basic 60,000 word lexicon, costing between ¥12,800 and ¥98,000.

In addition to the familiar area of user manual production, MICROPAK also found particular favor in universities and hospitals, where people used MICROPAK for producing English versions of scientific papers. "Writing papers is a big problem in Japan." explains Matsuo. Publishing in Japanese obviously severely limits the circulation of papers and would be futile in fields where English is the lingua-franca, yet few Japanese enjoy preparing English versions themselves.

Although it might seem like a doubtful proposition for Japanese people to produce texts in English for publication, Matsuo says that many of the users know English fairly well and are even able to provide valuable feedback to the developers; however, they find writing in English time-consuming and an MT program, even if it produces less than perfect output, simply saves time. This would match the perception foreign visitors inevitably get in Japan that Japanese people sometimes have a rather good passive knowledge of English. Nonetheless, Matsuo acknowledges that output quality remains the biggest problem. In investigating ways of improving the quality, he is considering developing a version in which the grammar is tailored to the specific domain of scientific papers and offering it and a general version of J/E, the latter at a lower price.

MT Labs also has an English-Japanese system under development, a considerably more ambitious product. Running under Unix (and possible os/2), it has a more sophisticated lfg architecture than its J-E counterpart and is being developed with the support of a new Hawaiian translation agency, Trans-Link, which hopes to begin using it sometime next year as part of its English-to-Asian language translation services. Trans-Link and MT Labs are collaborating on maintenance utilities and domain-specific dictionary modules for batch processing of translation for which, according to Matsuo, they have received patents.

As befits a young start-up venture, MT Labs is keeping its fixed costs low for the time being; the company is currently quartered in Matsuo's house in Niiza, about an hour from Tokyo. Here, the three developers can take advantage of the peaceful surroundings of this quiet suburb to concentrate on the tasks at hand. As the only small,

independent company completely dedicated to MT development, MT Laboratories is unique in Japan.

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