

# Back to the Drawing Board

*Bucking the trend to off-the-shelf, Alpnet returns to tools vending*

*After making a memorable decision several years ago to stop sales of its proprietary computer-assisted translation system and to use its technology exclusively as an in-house resource, Alpnet is back in the market with a new translation tool. Language International asked Alpnet president Jaap van der Meer to explain the new strategy.*

**LI:** Why is Alpnet bringing its tools back on the market?

**Jaap van der Meer:** Alpnet is fundamentally a technology-driven company. The translation/localization network (the Net) is actually the offspring of the original software company Alps, the "inventors" of translation-memory systems. We are bringing our tools back onto the market because we firmly believe that as a localization-service provider, we simply cannot remain dependent on tools from other suppliers. We have to integrate our tools into highly customized processes.

Our translation-memory tools have many advantages over other tools on the market. We have a large installed base of Alpnet users around the world and we would now like to extend this quickly by offering our tools to translators, translation companies, and departments outside our own network. This strategy will bring a number of benefits for Alpnet. We shall be promoting the name Alpnet while at the same time building up our network of suppliers who can work in a compatible environment. The biggest constraint on the growth of translation companies today is the lack of available, trained resources. Making our tools available will help us grow a little bit quicker.

**LI:** Who, in your view, actually buys translation tools?

**Jaap van der Meer:** So far, it has been the publishers that have held power in the translation/localization market, simply because demand has over-shadowed the deeply fragmented supply market. Software developers and publishers have imposed the use of translation-memory tools on their localization vendors to reduce the cost and time of the localization process. Translation companies have blindly

followed the advice given and interpret the investments as, simply, the cost of doing business.

Very rarely will translation companies or (freelance) translators make an independent choice to use a certain tool on the basis of their own judgment and comparison of features. They let it depend entirely on their customers, the software publishers. Translators will not make tool investments on their own; they prefer to work with files prepared by their translation-company employers. Which means they have to agree to use whatever tool they are given.

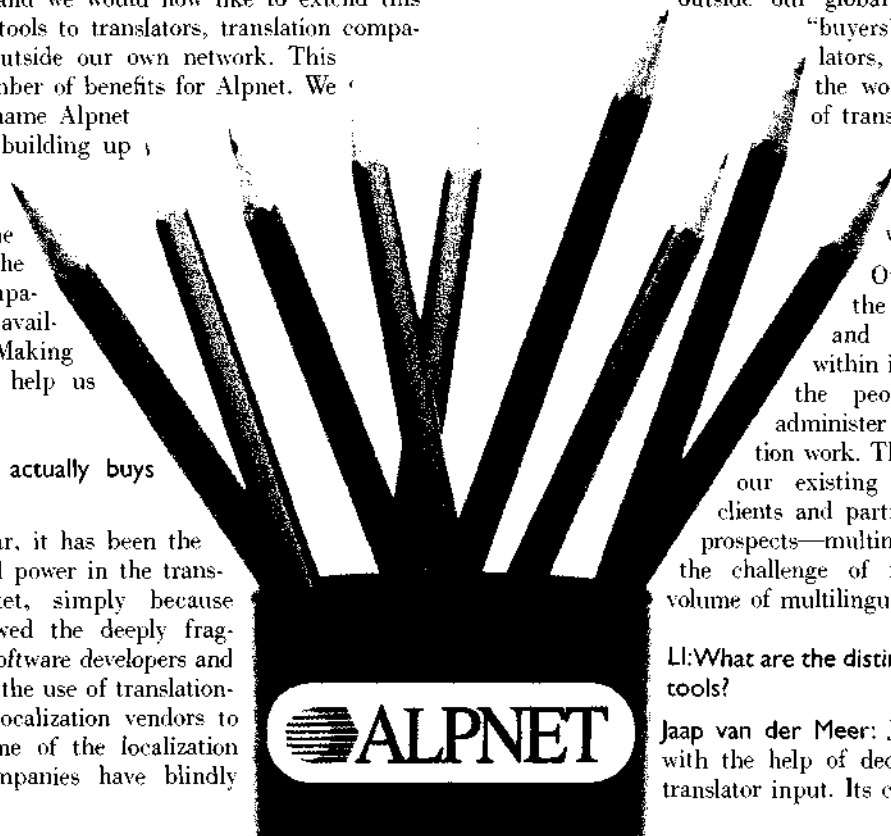
**LI:** Who are Alpnet's primary and secondary target buyers for its technology?

**Jaap van der Meer:** While competing tool suppliers have primarily been actively selling from the top down to publishers, Alpnet's strategy will be to promote its tools bottom-up among translators and translation companies. Our philosophy is to create a large installed base of satisfied users both inside and outside our global network. Our primary "buyers" are therefore the translators, those who actually do the work. There are thousands of translators in the world. Our marketing challenge is to have the majority of them using our software, called Joust.

Our secondary buyers are the translation companies and translation departments within international corporations, the people who manage and administer large volumes of translation work. This target market includes our existing global accounts, large clients and partners, but also many new prospects—multinational companies facing the challenge of managing an increasing volume of multilingual documentation.

**LI:** What are the distinctive features of Alpnet's tools?

**Jaap van der Meer:** Joust has been designed with the help of decades of internal/external translator input. Its chief features include:



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1. Joust is fast. Its architecture means that the translation-memory size does not slow down the translation engine.
2. Joust is easy to learn. We decided to separate the administrator's functions from the translator's, so translators only work with the features they need and can be up to speed very quickly.
3. Joust is an open system. With its filters and the support organization behind the tools, users can process virtually any kind of file.
4. AlpNet's client-server architecture is an optimum reflection of the actual structure of the industry, which tends to distribute translation tasks and centralize project and file management.

**LI: What will AlpNet's marketing strategy be?**

**Jaap van der Meer:** JoustLite, which is now available from our Web site, is a simple version that allows users to familiarize themselves with our tools. Early next year, we will bring out JoustPro, which will allow professional users to utilize translation memory and work in virtual teams, wherever they are physically related. They will be able to connect to the Internet and hook into the Translation Support Server to share glossaries and memory data-

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bases with translators who work on the same projects simultaneously or retrieve translations from legacy databases.

We believe that this will represent a major breakthrough in the translation industry, which by nature is peopled by teleworkers. The only reason translators came to work in offices from the mid 1980s onwards was that projects became too big for one single translator to handle. Translation companies are struggling with a shortage of available translators to work in corporate offices. Our JoustPro product is designed to solve that problem, by enabling localization companies to create virtual translation teams. They will continue to run the project preparation and engineering work in-house, but all the language work can be carried out online with translators working out of their own locations. This is what the industry needs!

**Contact**

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