You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet

The language industry has barely entered the
era of e-business, says one influential CEO.
Language International chats with eTranslate's Charlie Baxter.

Language International: How will the Web change the face of the language industry? What future do you see for the existing "localization" houses, and traditional "translation" bureaus?

Charlie Baxter: We believe the Web changes everything. The Web not only serves as a conduit for which traditional translation companies can attract new customers, it has inspired a new breed of companies to meet the growing demand for multilingual Web sites. Traditional translation and localization companies will need to embrace Web process technologies and applications as a core competency, and this is a very expensive and difficult skill set to develop. Ultimately, translation companies will need to be able to deliver

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complete multilingual solutions through their Web site if they are going to be competitive. Customer service and professional linguistic skills still remain absolutely vital elements of a relationship which traditional companies clearly possess, but these are no longer sustainable differentiators as clients are now demanding and getting much more so. There will always be a need for localization houses and traditional translation bureaus, but if they refuse to incorporate the latest technology into their business model, they may see their workload lighten over the next five to 10 years.

LI: What is the strategy of eTranslate? How do you see the company developing over the next few years, and how will it differentiate itself?

Charlie Baxter: eTranslate is a provider of Web globalization solutions. We are not simply an Internet company, though we obviously leverage the Internet to provide powerful interfaces into our growing technology platforms. We believe technology and capability-enhanced selling will provide very strong differentiation in the future. Translation companies who have the ability to respond to new Internet technologies in a timely matter will ultimately be the leaders in our fledgling industry.

LI: Name a few companies in the language industry that are, in your opinion, doing interesting things on the Web, and discuss why they are interesting.

Charlie Baxter: I don't think anybody—including us—is really doing anything very interesting on the Web, compared to where things will and have to go. We have been told a number of times that our Web site is a leader in the industry and we always reply politely that we're on version 2.0 of a 100 version plan. It takes a lot of time and effort to build a world-class Web site and a company has to be truly committed to the process in order for it to work. This industry does not have a great track record in developing and deploying world-class products, and I believe the current Web sites are no exception. But this needs to change. If the industry wants to be taken seriously by large corporations and venture capitalists, the ability to develop services that are scalable while offering the highest level of service is crucial. Too many companies offer a partial solution for Web-site globalization, perpetuating the myth that our industry is comprised of small players waiting for someone to demonstrate the characteristics associated with being a leader.

LI: What are the biggest challenges for eTranslate in the next two years?

Charlie Baxter: Recruiting world-class people who understand our business but who also have worked and been successful in companies that have delivered world-class service or products to their customers. Everyone at eTranslate is a shareholder of the company, so we're fanatical about the quality of the individuals who join our company and their commit-

ment to excellence. As the industry continues to grow, and more Internet companies realize the need for translation services, one of our biggest challenges will be continuing to maintain professional relationships with our network of over 12,000 language professionals. The number of quality language professionals worldwide will not be able to satisfy the demand for translation services over the next few years. By offering our language professionals the latest tools, best jobs, and the best compensation packages, we hope to retain their loyalty.

LI: Why did you acquire Glenn's Guide? How do you plan on using this as a tool in your business?

Charlie Baxter: Acquiring a resource like Glenn's Guide was a unique opportunity.

John Glenn is one of most trustworthy names in the translation business and he has developed an extensive database of language professionals worldwide. We are working very closely with John to integrate his group of language professionals into our community of professionals. John has also played an important role in developing the eTranslate.net site.

LI: You moved recently to start a certification program with Monterey. Describe how this will work and what advantage it will bring to you and the industry.

Charlie Baxter: Partnering with the Monterey Institute of International Studies sets a much-needed benchmark for the Web globalization industry. Because most companies are concerned about the quality of

the translation they are receiving, we have developed a model to alleviate their concerns. All of our language professionals are validated through a rigorous screening process. They are tested on their language and a specific subject area. We are hoping that our competitors will develop similar partnerships to improve the quality standards in the industry.

View from the Top

Language International: What role do you play in your organization? Describe your typical day.

Charlie Baxter: eTranslate is a very fast-moving, fast-growing organization. My job is to make sure we're building a strategically relevant enterprise and that we secure the resources necessary to fulfill our mission. My typical day begins at 6:00 AM and ends at midnight. Between those times are the many decisions throughout each day that help us to grow into a big, international business very quickly.

LI: How did you get into the industry?

CB: I've known Mike Demetrios and Jon Burke, the founders of Aleph.com, for many years. Back in 1998, I was very interested in what they were working on in the language industry. I had spent over five years living in Asia and was a buyer of translation services. After doing further research, I realized that Mike and Jon, along with another colleague, Ted Witt, were doing something very unique. Together we formed eTranslate to build a commercial opportunity.

LI: What are the three most important (and interesting) items in your briefcase?

CB: Well, I hate to say it, but I have one of those clever little phone cord spools that very conveniently allows me to hook up to any jack without entangling myself in a loose cord. A must-have is my cellular phone (I sold my Motorola stock when I

Name: Charlie Baxter

Title: president and CEO

Company: eTranslate, Inc.

email: cbaxter@etranslate.com

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first saw the new Nokia phones), along with an adaptor that allows me to get on the Web from anywhere. Finally, in winter I always carry ChapStick.

LI: What type of computer do you own personally?

CB: Dell Inspiron 3500.

LI: What's your favorite Web site?

CB: Winebid.com. Life is short!

LI: What's your favorite vacation spot?

CB: My wife and I like going to Bali, where we've visited many times as a result of our years living in Asia.

LI: What's your ideal leisure reading?

CB: I enjoy history, biographies, and absolutely irrelevant fiction that gives me a chance to relax.

LI: What languages do you speak?

CB: I don't speak any other languages well, but get by in Japan when I am there.

LI: What are your hobbies?

CB: Travel, wine, tennis, golf, and running.

LI: What do you see as the most significant change or trend now under way in the language industry?

CB: The impact that Web technologies (not just the Web!) have on the economics and requirements of the industry.

LI: If a genie gave you one wish for your profession or the industry, what would it be?

CB: Would somebody please tell my fellow Americans that this is not an English world!