



Adventures in Localisation Land

Suzanne Topping, who has “run the rapids” of the wild world of localisation, shares some highlights of her journey

Looking back over my years in the localisation business, it feels more like an epic journey than a career. Here’s what I mean.

Adventure #1: There must be an easier way

My adventures in localisation land began in the early 1990’s at Kodak, where I lived the exciting life of a technical writer, pounding out compelling tomes filled with “click the start button.” It was there that I encountered localisation, and realised what a slow, expensive, inefficient beast it could be. “There must be an easier way to do this,” became my new refrain.

Being young and idealistic, I decided that I was the man for the job, and talked my boss into adding localisation to the group’s functions. And so began the journey.

Adventure #2: The corporate roller-coaster

Working for Kodak was great. They had money and interesting projects. The pace was fast, and the challenges exciting. For a while I had fun, building two localisation groups from the ground floor up, working with the latest digital technology, and developing agile, efficient processes. (We developed a process for simultaneously delivering 8 applications for 5 platforms in 6 languages without English delay, which was described in the book “Translating Into Success”)

Unfortunately, corporate bureaucracies tend to stifle creative problem solving. High-

level restructuring eventually propelled me to jump off.

Adventure #3: The fleeting joy of working at home

After ejecting from the corporate roller coaster in 1998, I settled in with a contented sigh to life as an independent contractor. Working as Localization Unlimited, I helped localisation companies understand client needs, and provided process improvement consulting on the client side. I began writing for Language International and MultiLingual Computing and Technology magazines, and started the North East Localization Special Interest Group, NELOCSIG, forum, the first of its kind. Over the next two years, website localisation became more popular, and information sharing venues began to appear as the industry matured.

Adventure #4: Return to the fast lane

I was enjoying myself too much, so something had to change. In the summer of 2001, my husband was ready to jump off the corporate thrill ride himself, and we combined forces to create BizWonk Inc., with a goal of helping small companies deal with the challenges of multilingual software. Small companies have wide ranging needs, and over time we added services like international market research and marketing plan development. Trade issues came to the forefront in 2001, prompting me to attend a White House briefing with President Bush.

Adventure #5: The perils of non-profitdom

Starting BizWonk didn’t quite kill me, so I took on another startup; the Professional Association of Localization (PAL) in the autumn of 2001 which nearly finished the job. Despite the blood, sweat, and tears, it was satisfying to start the ball rolling, and watch other organisations spring up in our wake.

Around that time I had the revelation that dabbling in Unicode would be a great way to make friends and influence people. After spending hours of grueling research to write several articles on the subject, I conceded (with relief) that I am a generalist, and will never be a member of the Unicode glitterati.

Thinking that issues like locale handling might be more my speed, I became an Invited Expert to the World Wide Web Consortium’s Internationalization Working group’s Guidelines, Education, and Outreach task force, where I attempt to help them spread The Word.

Adventure #6: There must be an easier way (Take 2)

Keeping PAL going while trying to run BizWonk prompted the thought once again that there MUST be an easier way. Frustration led to inspiration, and a merge with The Institute of Localisation Professionals (TILP) was initiated. Given that we faced the same set of challenges while trying to achieve the same set of goals, it made sense to combine forces rather than compete.

What’s next?

It’s always easier to look back on an era and define its key elements than to see them at the time. What comes next is hard to predict. Clients will continue to influence our services, and the next episode is likely to be “The Raging Rapids of Multilingual SEO” or some other horror.

Wish me luck! ■

Suzanne Topping is the Vice President of BizWonk Inc., recent winners of the ClientSide Excellence Award for Technical Consulting. BizWonk provides a range of services which help small and midsize companies do business internationally. Suzanne, also a TILP Council Member, can be reached at stopping@bizwonk.com

IWIPS

2003

5th Annual International Workshop on
Internationalisation of Products and Systems
Berlin, Germany • 17-19 July 2003

The program will cover topics in reference to e-business and web applications, mobile applications, case studies, design guidelines and methods and processes. Keynote speakers are **Bert Esselink**, Lionbridge, NL; **Nancy Hoft**, Nancy Hoft Consulting, USA, and **Pat O’Sullivan**, IBM, Ireland. Pre-conference tutorials by: **Susan Dray**, **Nancy Hoft** and **Aaron Marcus**.

visit www.iwips2003.org