TermNet: The story of a Terminology Association

Photo: TermNet

The International Terminology Summer School 2013

When TermNet, the International Network for Terminology, was founded 25 years ago, nobody could have predicted which path of development it would take - or whether it would be able to survive. Of course its foundation did not happen out of the blue. Terminology in the 1980 was closely linked to research, standardization and the public sector. However, for some years the International Information Centre for Terminology (Infoterm) had been increasingly involved in activities concerning an emerging "market" for terminology products and services. Software to support terminologists were being developed, the computerization and growing globalization created new demands for services and products to manage terminology. The signs therefore were clear. But they were still scarce. Was it really a trend?

In 1988, finally, demands and activities had grown to such an extent that it was impossible for a scientific, non-commercial organization as Infoterm to continue

its commercial activities. TermNet was founded with the support of the Austrian Standards Institute and endorsed by UNESCO. It was to be the commercial but non-profit branch of Infoterm, and would take care of the business and market oriented activities. And for many years to come this was exactly what Term-Net did.

The network was instrumental in the fostering, promotion and shaping of the emerging terminology market, in advocating the matter of multilingualism and terminology at EU and international level, in providing training, support and in sharing its knowledge. The success was not in the last due to its valuable global network of organizations, experts, initiatives and training institutes that was a legacy of Infoterm. The diversity of scope, teachings and concerns within this network proved to be an asset.

It is a hardly known fact today that TermNet was involved in the development in the first Multiterm version, by then still an EU pro-

ject – today, owned by SDL, one of the biggest business successes in the language industries. But who would know the roots and origins of Multiterm anyhow? Times have changed a lot. But SDL is still a TermNet Member.

Today no one can deny that there exists a market for terminology products and services. The large number of companies, service providers, selling their tools and goods and know-how is ample proof. And there are the clients of these products and services, whose needs are driven by the demands of a globalized world. The market is strong, and it has learned to speak for itself. Therefore TermNet's former mission has been accomplished. It was time to find new challenges.

As terminology tools became ever more sophisticated and the international policy framework took a satisfying shape, TermNet found that the next big challenge was content and interoperability of systems. After the turn of the millennium it was also time to become fully inde-

pendent from Infoterm. TermNet became a fully grown organization under separate leadership.

Today, TermNet's main concern can be described as something that is often missing, but deciding about success or failure of many businesses: Quality.

Prerequisites for quality are

- Dedication and commitment.
- Capacity building for those working with terminology - regardless function or profession.
- Certification, to help clients and customers assess what they are spending money on, while at the same time help strengthen the sales argument.
- Cooperation and partnerships that create mutually beneficial and efficient synergies.

How are these values translated into action? What exactly does TermNet do to promote and foster them?

First and foremost all activities and achievements are the product of the association, and as such the network of members. As the governing force, the General Assembly of Members, decide about the work programme and fields of engagement. On top of this, members are directly involved in activities, depending on their capacities and willingness.

One such strategy is the development of training programmes that complement university programmes or fill the gaps that these long-term programmes leave for those who have no possibility to attend them. Terminology managers today come in a variety of functions, professions and designations. They are translators, language planners, developers, researchers, consultants, technical writers, training officers in organizations, documentation experts, and editors, to name but a few.

Furthermore they come as external consultants running their own business, members of a specialized department in a company or government, or they simply manage terminology as an add-on to their actual day-job. Only a fraction of these enjoy the benefits and the luxury of a classical university course in terminology methodology. Most wake up one day and find they have become "accidental terminologists". Short courses in terminology management that lead to a recognized certification are therefore a long overdue answer to real needs. TermNet joined forces with the European Certification and Qualification Association (ECQA). The result is the ECQA Certified Terminology Manager Job Role certificates for the levels *Basic* and *Advanced*.

The University of Pompeu Fabra, a member of the TermNet Network itself, is directly involved in these projects, as members of the Job Role Committee that develops the curriculum and as accredited training institution for ECQA trainings. A very good example of a fruitful cooperation carried out completely by TermNet members.

TermNet, being the most visible partner for this initiative, offers ECQA training courses in the form of online Webinars or the International Terminology Summer School which takes place every July. TermNet, with it, has by now become one of the major international providers of trainings and short courses on terminology management.

It is not enough for translations, publications, software and technology, to be cheap. Customers and clients have been more and more aware of their quality. Certification of services and products should assist and guide them in their purchasing decisions. At the same time it strengthens the sales arguments of those who do provide high quality services.

In partnership with the Austrian Standards Institute, TermNet founded LICS, the Language Industry Certification System, which not only fosters such awareness, but also takes the lead in the development of certification schemes on the basis of standards. The beginning was made in 2006 with the now widely known European Standard EN 15038 "Translation services – Service requirements", a standard that gave minimal criteria that a translation service provider had to fulfil with respect to the client and assignment. By 2013, hundreds have been LICS certified all over the world by partner organizations. Some stakeholders in the public sector in Europe have made this a requirement for all external contractors.

The target is set and developments are promising. And still there are many things to achieve. The global economic crisis of the past years has affected the governing and funding of TermNet. To become fully independent and self-reliant has been a major goal for TermNet for the past decade. Not always an easy task, but necessary for the resilience and thus survival of an organization. Over the years, TermNet has witnessed too many organizations and initiatives fall apart because the funding life line was cut off. In 2012 the TermNet Business Ltd. was founded to formally handle profit-oriented commercial activities. TermNet Americas Ltd. was also founded in order to expand activities on this huge continent.

TermNet will continue to reinvent itself in order to address an ever changing economic and social context. However, with the flexibility and dedication of the people who are behind the organization – members, partners and staff – there will be an exciting and flourishing future ahead.

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