

## Technology in the Global Village

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Technology allows us to communicate over space and time. The advancement in mobile and digital technologies makes it possible for us to be both witnesses and participants of one of the most important revolutions in the history of mankind: the way we communicate with each other. We, the people living in the Global Village of the 21st century, can - in principle - interact with almost any other person on the planet. All geographical and time barriers have fallen, and one of the only barriers still standing is language. And technology can easily overcome such barrier by providing access to translators and interpreters, 24/7, anywhere in the world, in over 170 languages.

Our profession is growing at a rate of 22% per year, even during a worldwide downturn in the economy. Today we can provide our valuable services of multilingual and multicultural communication via telephone (landlines and cellular), video connection, and web-based devices. Face-to-face encounters are now just part of the mix. This radical change in technology is transforming the entire profession at the speed of light. Did you know individuals out there may now work with multilingual content "instantly" from any computer? The technology is here. There are professionals already working with it. Did you know there is a fully-functional "Virtual Hospital" rendering services to real-life patients? Did you know that many hospitals are already using remote medical interpreters in their day-to-day operations? The skills set required may be somewhat different to accommodate for the new delivery modes, but the basic principles of interpreting are the same.

The information age has changed human life profoundly. It has changed culture, and it has changed language, it has changed the medical environment, the means of communication, and even our thought process. Our lives are now dominated by the likes of ipads and ipods, smart phones and super phones, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, cloud computing, crowd sourcing, vertical social networks, podcasts, e-learning, videoconferences, interactive gaming, virtual events, virtual this and virtual that. And we, the interpreters and translators of this new century, need to adapt to these technologies or seriously risk becoming professionally obsolete. Mobile and digital communication is impacting the way the world does business and the manner in which we humans relate to each other. It is imperative that we embrace technology to remain relevant in our Global Village.

Some thirty-five years ago I worked on my first translations using an old IBM typewriter. A 20-page document could take a week to be completed, as you typed and re-typed pages, consulted big fat printed dictionaries, and travelled to the local public library to do your research. When I started interpreting in the early 80's, interpreting booths were rather primitive by today's standards (although we were considered "crème de la crème", treated that way, and paid accordingly... oh, well...). Most of that world is gone and now we must become very aware of that.

With CAT technologies in vogue, you may receive a 20-page translation today at noon for "post-editing" with a deadline of "tomorrow". Most of the "work" might have been completed by an automated memory tool. Interpreting assignments are being scheduled by sophisticated software out of a master computer located somewhere in India or Costa Rica. The translation and interpreting industry has become at many levels "impersonal". It has even changed its designation to that of "Language Service Providers" - the LSP industry - now driven more by bottom-line corporate profits and "availability" than quality of intellectual and ethical output. That is the bad news. But I want to talk about the good news.

The good news, for example, is that there were no language interpreters in healthcare in the 70's (or at least not a significant number to consider it a profession). Now, medical and healthcare interpreting is a very important part of the medical world. Additionally, Interpreters are no longer confined to the face to face encounter. This allows any individual who speaks any language and needs any healthcare service anywhere in the world to have access to it in his/her "preferred language". LSP's are making it possible.



At present, there are three rapidly growing fields (modes of delivery) for interpreters, especially medical/healthcare interpreters: (1) OPI, over-the-phone interpreting, providing 24/7 “instant” access to interpreters in hundreds of languages; (2) VRI, Video Remote Interpreting, using high-speed internet-based video connection to provide visual access to an interpreter who is in a different physical location - VRI is already commercially available and in use in many hospitals; (3) Web-based multi-format communication, which allows for instant interactive dialogue (text/voice/video) in multiple languages. Interactive is rapidly becoming the new kid on the block, and interpreting more necessary than ever.

As a side note, I understand that training of qualified interpreters, especially in the medical/healthcare field, is of the utmost importance. Actually, it is vital to prevent medical errors. And it is also important to define the new roles of the remote interpreter. But that is not the point of this particular document, so we will discuss that issue at a later date.

My central point today is to stress the need to acknowledge, understand and embrace the digital revolution which, coupled with the onset of broadband and mobile computing on 3G and 4G networks, is rapidly changing our world and our profession. This is a statement in the present continuous. This is our reality today, already here. I believe that the term "remote video interpreter" and "remote simultaneous medical interpreter" are here to stay. Quality and consistency will improve and the industry will eventually deal with the current deficiencies and weaknesses brought about by the fast pace of change. But if one wishes to remain an active participant of this new reality, the first thing one needs to do is to accept the existence of such a reality. And I've seen many who think that they can simply "make it all go away". I stand on the opposite side of the road, in the middle of the plaza, shouting out loud to all who wish to listen: learning is not an option. Embrace technology and run with it.

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