

Michael Scholand

Global foresight and the freeway race



The GlobalSight Open Source Initiative by Welocalize has helped trigger discussion of open-source software (OSS) in the industry. *MultiLingual* published an article, "The race for open source," in its December 2008 issue, and the race is indeed being run; some companies such as ours are already using OSS to our advantage.

Rather than an attempt to compete with the still somewhat lackluster translation memory software (TMS) market, Welocalize's decision to open-source GlobalSight seems an extremely smart move to tie in existing and future service customers. It doesn't require amazing powers of clairvoyance to guess whom the partners in development will choose as a vendor when they need to outsource localization services. All the big players in the GILT market have one thing in common: they have either developed or acquired a whole set of technological solutions that they use to capture and lock in service customers. And there we probably have the second, if not the first, intention behind the Transware acquisition and the subsequent OSS initiative: to create a technology platform ready to compete with the likes of Lionbridge's Logoport, SDL's Idiom WorldServer or TransPerfect's GlobalLink solution suite. The real story is one of a vigorous climber fighting for its place in the sun.

So, apart from Welocalize, just who is in the race to release the first functional globalization management system (GMS) as open source, hoping to become the new market leader? Two of the four OSS contenders mentioned by]project-open[creator Frank Bergmann in the December article, namely FOLT with its OpenTM and Andrä AG with ontram TM, are merely open sourcing or intending to open source TMSs. Add to this that searches for open sourcing of the ontram TM module at www.andrae-ag.de turn up no results, and to all appearances, FOLT's OpenTM hasn't left the specification stage either. In short, two of the contestants have not made it off the starting blocks yet. Professional gamblers may already like to pick out the lame ducks and the likely winners of this lopsided race.

Regardless of politics, open-source software and the open-source community are, in fact, a means of lowering development costs. Thus, the model can also be of interest to smaller language service providers. This is especially so if they have a focus on technology, as they can benefit from the efficiency gains the OSS model offers.

STAR Servicios Lingüísticos is a good example. Starting off in 1999 as a production center for the STAR Group, it began to develop into a small multilanguage vendor (MLV) in 2003. Project management grew more and more complex, and it became obvious that the existing toolkit was no longer up to the task. The ever-growing volume of data

was processed in various applications and stored in different physical and virtual locations. The results were data redundancies, duplications and inconsistencies. Repetitive tasks were carried out manually, resulting in error-prone, unproductive processes. In short, a TMS became a definite must.

The "buy or build" question prompted an evaluation of the TMS solutions then on the market. All commercially available systems lacked one thing or another (this one not web-enabled, that one not open source), but most importantly, they were only focused on translation project management processes, leaving out other fundamental business processes: customer relationship management and knowledge management, for example.

Our idea was that translation project management is a collaborative task. So, we thought, why not use a system designed to improve collaboration — in other words a groupware or "workgroup support system" — as our development platform for a TMS? After another round of evaluation, this time of existing open-source groupware applications, we decided to go with EGW (www.egroupware.org).

EGW, an open-source, multi-user, web-based groupware suite, supports multiple operating systems and various database platforms. It is PHP-based and multilingual. On SourceForge, it ranks third in the groupware section, with an activity percentile of 99.95% and 1,920,437 downloads. Its 1.6 release features the typical groupware modules: address book, calendar, task management, Wiki, timesheet, knowledge base and so on.

After considering all of the options, EGW was installed, and we immediately started to use it for everything from group calendars to tribal knowledge management. At the same time, we commenced development of our TMS modules, including client and provider modules. We released the first productive milestone last spring, and now, after six months of intensive use, we can proudly say that we are achieving our targets. Our new TMS is the central control panel from which we can manage all the resources used in localization projects. At the same time, it is linked to existing EGW applications, which means we have already covered the first steps in developing an integrated, MLV-specific groupware system. Thanks to its open architecture, this system gives us infinite room for continuous improvement and innovation. **M**

Michael Scholand, cofounder and CEO of STAR Servicios Lingüísticos, has worked as a translator and project manager at Polylang Ltd. and WORDSTATION GmbH. He holds a degree in applied modern languages and a master's in quality management.

To offer your own Takeaway, write to editor@multilingual.com