

Business-minded

Bringing together ITI's corporate and individual members provided an interesting forum for exchanging ideas and views, says **James Valentine**



James Valentine is managing director of Bedford Translations, a corporate member of ITI

The idea of a 'Business Day' was a new venture for ITI. Held at the Thistle Hotel in central London on 10 June, the day was aimed specifically at ITI's corporate members and the business aspects of the translation profession – agreeing standards, looking after the client, using the internet more effectively, etc. The outcome was excellent – new initiatives were launched, old friends met up and much networking took place.

One of those new initiatives is the Translation Company Prize, which was announced by Catherine Greensmith, ITI's Chairman. The idea of the prize is to reward excellence and those translation companies that maintain good relationships with their freelance translators. More significantly, following the results of a survey corporate members, a Job Posting scheme has been introduced on the ITI website. As far as we are aware, this is the only facility of its kind to be run by a professional translation organisation. The posting scheme, currently in its trial phase, could eventually compete with ProZ, Translators' Café, etc. This scheme has the potential to be a 'winner' for ITI and early indications are that it is already popular with translators and translation companies alike.

As well as introducing Job Posting, ITI's General Secretary Alan Wheatley gave a detailed account of ITI's website development, demonstrating its versatility and strength as a marketing vehicle.

Statistics show that average daily visits have doubled since 2003, and now stand at 700 per day. In addition, ITI has recently been recording actual enquiries to the site. Enquiries for a translator have exceeded 6,000 over a three-month period, and for interpreters more than 3,500. Corporate members are well served by the Directory, with over 1,400 enquiries over a three-month period.

Liz Robertson, Chairman of Robertson Languages International



Positive feedback: freelancers heard that customers will pay for a quality service

and Chairman of the UK Mirror Group on the proposed CEN standard on translation, gave the meeting an authoritative account of standards developments within the translation industry. Hotfoot from a meeting of key players in Copenhagen, she summarised the vast amount of work going into developing a Europe-wide standard and warned that the Americans, Chinese and others are moving fast and could overtake Europe in this respect. The theme of her talk was that clients will pay for quality, so long as it is demonstrated, and that documented standards are part of this. Her wonderful comparison of the translation profession with a hedgehog (rather shy, secretive and extremely prickly) was, considering the audience, quite brave, but the essential point – that a far more outgoing attitude is needed to 'spread the word' about quality – was taken well.

The keynote speaker, Isabella Moore, is well known for her public role as Director of the National Centre for Languages and previously as President of the British Chambers of Commerce. But Council specifically asked her to speak about her business experience as managing director of a medium-sized translation firm.

Isabella's presentation showed an acute understanding of sales and marketing in small businesses and her talk was a veritable tour de force – an outstanding exposition of how understanding your customer can lead to business success.

Creating 'added value' in a crowded market with few barriers to entry, dominated by the internet, was her theme. As was careful profiling of clients so that they are differentiated in terms of loyalty, price sensitivity and profitability.

Her conclusion, from which many of the translation companies present could take heart, was that local factors and personal contacts still play a huge part. Customers should be contacted time and again, and job follow-up – especially when something doesn't go to plan – helps to cement relationships.

Many customers look for an overall business solution, and strategic partnerships within the industry can help bring this about. Last but not least, if you can prove that you are providing a quality service, customers are willing to pay for it.

Overall, this was a superb day, and one that would be well worth repeating next year.