



# translorial

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Northern California Translators Association • A chapter of *ata*, American Translators Association

## A Lesson in Translation

By Hannelore McCrumb

Good morning! Guten Tag! Bon Jour! Buenos Días! Dobro Jutro! Buongiorno! Bom Dia! Bos Días! God dag! Goedemorgen! Hyvää Huomenta! Jó Napot! Moien! Salve!

Fifteen pairs of eyes stared at me—curiously, apprehensively, expectantly, indifferently. It was March, 26, 2003, the biennial Career Day at the Saratoga High School. I had been asked by NCTA to give a presentation on the profession of translating and/or interpreting, and I was happy to oblige.

The session was to last forty minutes, of which I was to allow ten minutes for a question and answer period. I enthusiastically imparted a picture of a bright and exciting future as a translator of diverse and exotic topics or as an interpreter of multilingual matters for the courts, the Olympics, the World Cup, the diplomatic corps, the United Nations, you name it, with travels all over the world. Alas, there were no questions! I had even prepared a little hand-out—a folder for each student that contained mostly website print-outs includ-

### NCTA 2003 Calendar

- General meetings
- ▶ September 20, December 13
- Deadline for submissions to next *Translorial*
- ▶ August 10
- ATA annual conference – Phoenix, AZ
- ▶ November 5-8

ing the homepages of the Monterey Institute, Diplomatic Language Services, ATA, NCTA, and an online book mall with a list of translator self-training books. Also, in the folder (and this might be of interest to you, dear reader) I included an L.A. Times article by David Kelly that appeared, very opportunely, on March 21, 2003, "Where language is no barrier," as well as a San José Mercury News article by Eric Lai from August 6, 1995, "Demand is changing translation industry." (Of course, that was before the "Fall.")

The fifteen students were predominantly freshmen. First-year students cannot even IMAGINE a life after school, much less a professional life. I had acquired some experience with high school students when, for years, I

### 10th Anniversary of TWO LINES!

To celebrate CAT's TENTH ANNIVERSARY and the launch of *Parties*, the newest issue of **TWO LINES: A Journal of Translation**, CAT is hosting a party on **Sunday, June 8th from 6 pm to 11 pm at the Café du Nord in San Francisco**. The event will include an array of live musical and dance performances, bilingual poetry readings from *Parties* and past **TWO LINES** issues, and a silent auction. Proceeds from the event will support CAT's highly acclaimed education program, **Poetry Inside Out**, and the organization's literary program, which includes publication of **TWO LINES** as well as CAT's free bilingual reading series in San Francisco.

**Location:** Café du Nord is located at 2170 Market Street, San Francisco, CA

**Program:** 6 pm doors open, 7 pm program begins, 9 pm to 11 pm party continues with surprise World Music DJ. Enjoy good food and drink, a multicultural bazaar of live musical and dance performances, bilingual poetry readings from parties as well as past **TWO LINES** issues, and a silent auction!

**Tickets:** \$15-\$30 sliding scale (includes light buffet). Order a copy of *Parties*, and you'll receive a coupon for \$3 off admission to the party!\* To purchase tickets in advance, please call the Center for Art in Translation at (415) 512-8812 or send an email to [party@CATtranslation.org](mailto:party@CATtranslation.org). Visit the **TWO LINES** website for information and updates, including performance details and a description of auction items.

\*The admission fee is tax-deductable to the full extent allowed by law.

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## Letter from the President

These are not easy times. It takes skill to see yourself through them, to not lose sight of your objectives in life, personal and public, and to bring them to completion. As an institution representing the interests of translators and interpreters, we on the NCTA board are not unaware of these sentiments. I can assure you that the board, which consists entirely of volunteers drawn from the membership of the Association, is doing its outmost to meet its own set of goals.

There are scheduled monthly meetings of the board, extraordinary sessions when needed, and lively discussions on the e-mail list for board members. At our day-long annual retreat, we find the time to review the policies we had set for the past year and to look at things that have worked, at things that need revision, and at things that are new and need to be addressed in the coming year. Individual board members also get a chance, if they wish, to take on new responsibilities, or hand off tasks to others, or set up a committee to help with chores that would be too demanding for a single person. In short, the board does not take its responsibilities lightly, and it would be unfair to say otherwise.

But we are not a closed society, remote from the needs of the entire membership. Quite the contrary: we encourage you to get in touch with us and to express interest in areas where you feel you have the time and resources to help us. Volunteering is a rewarding experience in itself. Besides expanding your network and learning new skills, there is also the satisfaction of being recognized by the membership for the sacrifices you make to serve the Association as a volunteer.



To name but a few NCTA events organized recently with the active assistance of volunteering members, there was our Tech 101 workshop, the Kaffeeklatsch in San Francisco, and the May general meeting with a presentation by one of our longstanding members and respected colleagues, Anna Navarro Schlegel. I think everyone will agree that these were great moments in the life of an Association that exists only to serve your professional interests.

On another note, I wish to take this opportunity to thank Essam Elmahgoob for his many contributions to the Association, especially in his capacity as legislative chair, and express my sorrow at his resignation from the board.

*Michael Metzger*

# Japanese Literature Prize

## Prize for Translation of Japanese Literature Goes to Couple from Northern California

Shogo Oketani and Leza Lowitz from Petaluma, California, are among the winners for best translations of this year's Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Awards for the Translation of Japanese Literature, the Donald Keene Center of Japanese Culture announced last month. Mr. Oketani and Ms. Lowitz are going to receive the award for their translation of *America and Other Poems* by Ayakawa Nobuo.

The Donald Keene Center of Japanese Culture also awards Professor Charles S. Inouye for the translation of *Japanese Gothic Tales* by Izumi Kyouka. Mr. Inouye is currently Associate Professor of Japanese, Co-Director of the International Letters and Visual Studies Program, and Dean of the Colleges for Undergraduate Education at Tufts University.

Shogo Oketani and Leza Lowitz are freelance translators, editors and writers, residing in Petaluma, California. Mr. Oketani, a graduate of Keio University (B.S. Philosophy/Literature) has served as Adjunct Professor of Translation at the Monterey Institute of International Studies and as news correspondent and translator for *The Sangyo Times* in Tokyo, Japan. In addition to translating Ayukawa Nobuo and Sakaguchi Ango, he is the author of *Cold River*, a work of original poetry published by Marodosha in 1992. Mr. Oketani is the co-author, with Ms. Lowitz, of *Designing with Kanji: Japanese Character Motifs for Surface, Skin & Spirit* (forthcoming, Stone Bridge Press).

In 1997, Mr. Oketani and Ms. Lowitz received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts to begin translation of Ayukawa Nobuo's poetry, which has been a strong inspiration to Mr. Oketani personally and to many important writers and poets of the postwar and subsequent generation. He is honored to bring this profound, lyrical and politically astute work to an English-speaking audience.

Ms. Lowitz earned her B.A. in English from the University of California, Berkeley, and an M.A. in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University, where she taught before moving to Japan in 1989. While in Japan, she was a Lecturer at Tokyo University and a contributor to the *Japan Times*, *Art in America*, the *Asahi Evening News*, *The San Francisco Chronicle* and *NHK Radio's Japan Diary*. Her honors include the PEN Syndicated Fiction Award and the PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award for Poetry. She has also received fellowships in translation from the National Endowment for the Arts and The National Endowment for the Humanities. Ms. Lowitz co-translated the award-winning anthologies of contemporary Japanese women's poetry, *A Long Rainy Season and Other Side River* (Stone Bridge Press) and is currently co-translating the prison-camp haiku of WWII internee Itaru Ina. She is also editing Donald Richie's *Japan Journals 1947-2002*.

The prizes will be presented to Mr. Oketani, Ms. Lowitz, and Professor Inouye during an award ceremony at Columbia University in the spring of 2004.

### Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Prize for the Translation of Japanese Literature

The Donald Keene Center of Japanese Culture at Columbia University annually awards \$5,000 in Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Prizes for the Translation of Japanese Literature. A prize is given for the best translation of a modern work of literature or for the best classical literary translation, or the prize is divided between several works. Translators of any nationality are wel-



come to apply. To qualify, works must be book-length translations of Japanese literary works: novels, collections of short stories, literary essays, memoirs, drama, or poetry. Submissions are judged on the literary merit of the translation and the accuracy with which it reflects the spirit of the Japanese original. Eligible works include unpublished manuscripts, works in press, or books published during the two years prior to the prize year. Applications are accepted from translators or their publishers. Previous winners are ineligible.

For detailed eligibility requirements and entry procedures, please contact the Donald Keene Center at 212-854-5036 or visit the website at:

[www.columbia.edu/cu/ealac/dkc/translation.htm](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ealac/dkc/translation.htm)

## A Lesson in Translation

By Hannelore McCrumb

*Continued from page 1*

did German conversation once a week with German III & IV students at my daughters' high school. So I was aware of the diffidence and reluctance to ask questions, and I knew I had to prepare enough material to get me through the entire forty minutes. I was glad I did.

The school had provided me with a suggested outline of the presentation: description of the career, career path, educational requirements, personal requirements, compensation, opportunities, etc. This was helpful to me in preparing my little discourse about our profession.

At the beginning of the session, just for fun, I greeted the students in several languages and asked if any of them had grown up bilingually. Three had. For a school with a 55% Asian student population, I was surprised to see that only three Asians attended my session, but they were the three that live in a bilingual family environment. One student, a native English-speaking Caucasian boy, had lived with his parents in Japan for a few years, and he spoke Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. The eleven other students were native English speakers and had taken one foreign language course so far. The school offers French, Japanese, Mandarin and Spanish, but no German or other European languages. I asked what had interested them in possibly pursuing a career as a translator or interpreter. They weren't at all sure, and they said that's why they wanted to find out more about this type of career.

My presentation, of course, was a very personal one. For me, working with languages, the spoken and written word, the feeling of being connected with the world through the language medium, interacting with culturally diverse peo-

ple—all this has held a fascination for as long as I can remember. This appeal I wanted to convey to these students in front of me.

I tried not to embellish anything. I explained that translating and interpreting is not part of the curriculum at any college or university in the USA, except in those two private language institutes mentioned above, although it is in Europe (I am not familiar with the Asian countries). I told them that they wouldn't get rich quickly and that it takes patience to establish oneself as a qualified translator or interpreter; but hey, no profession is learned and perfected overnight. Yes, there are more and more machine translation tools on the market, but none of them will ever eliminate the need for translators or, especially, for interpreters. Students of translating and interpreting should get at least a bachelor's degree and specialize in a particular field. To perfect their language skills as well as to get to know the world, I recommended spending time abroad. I told them that I find it very challenging and rewarding to express something written in one language in another; that this profession is a tool to get to know a great deal about different fields of interest; that language is and will remain a medium for international understanding; and, last but not least, that working in the field of translating and interpreting keeps your brain fit. But above all, one has to have a love for languages, for people, and for challenges.

I enjoyed this assignment and will gladly do it again if the opportunity arises. Why not, now that I have a presentation all ready to go? Thanks, Yves Avérous and Juliet Viola, for having had me in mind!

### NCTA on the Internet

We have our own domain on the Web. Check out NCTA's home page at [www.ncta.org](http://www.ncta.org).

There you will find information about our organization, a selection of past articles from *Translorial*, and other helpful information.

From our home page there is a link to The Translator's Home Companion, or you can go directly to [www.lai.com/companion.html](http://www.lai.com/companion.html).

As a benefit of membership, NCTA maintains three free mailing lists:

- ▶ [NCTA-Members@yahoogroups.com](mailto:NCTA-Members@yahoogroups.com), for general-interest discussions and exchanges of information;
- ▶ [EntreNous@yahoogroups.com](mailto:EntreNous@yahoogroups.com), for francophones and those interested in the French language;
- ▶ [CiberTertulia@yahoogroups.com](mailto:CiberTertulia@yahoogroups.com), for Spanish-speakers and those interested in the Spanish language.

These lists are available only to NCTA members and will not accept messages from non-subscribers. For further information, visit the NCTA Web site at [www.ncta.org/html/list.html](http://www.ncta.org/html/list.html). For a free subscription to any of these lists, e-mail a request to [listmaster@ncta.org](mailto:listmaster@ncta.org).

If you are a subscriber and have not recently received any list mail, write to the listmaster and complain.

The recently published California standards for healthcare interpreters are available on the website of the California Healthcare Interpreters Association: <http://chia.ws>.

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# The way ahead for Eurodicautom

*Despite rumours to the contrary, Michel Vanden-Abeelee tells Joanna Waller of plans to make Eurodicautom bigger and better*

*Joanna Waller is Chairman of ITI's Networks and Regional Groups Committee.*

**Joanna Waller:** *Mr Vanden-Abeelee, could you tell us a little of your background and how you reached your current post?*

**Mr V-A:** I am Belgian and I have worked for the EC throughout my career, joining in 1973. Last year, I was appointed as DG of the Translation Service by the European Commission on a proposal by Vice-President Neil Kinnock.

Previously, I was Director-General for the Customs Union and Taxation, Deputy Director-General for Budget and I served as a member of the Cabinet of the late Roy Jenkins, when he was President.

**JW:** *How is the translation service of the EC organised at the present time?*

**Mr V-A:** The Translation Service currently has 1,850 staff, of whom two-thirds work in Brussels and one-third in Luxembourg. Its main clients are the other Directorates-General of the European Commission. We produce the basic texts for the Council and the Parliament.

Following enlargement, a further 450 staff will be added by 2005. The enlargement process is a tremendous challenge for the Service, as the number of languages handled will increase from 11 to 21.

**JW:** *The members of the ITI, many of whom are freelance translators, are very interested in Eurodicautom, the EC's terminology base which is presently open to public access. How does this work behind the scenes?*

**Mr V-A:** Eurodicautom employs 14 full-time linguists, six secretarial staff and one data officer. It underwent a revamp a couple of years ago, giving it a more user-friendly interface, but it is presently under review by the Inter-Institutional Committee for Translation and Interpretation which I chair. This Committee is working towards merging the terminology bases for the Council, the Parliament, the Commission and the European Court of Justice this year into an inter-institutional terminology database.

This will involve much work on the part of the staff involved and there are many factors to take into account such as confidentiality, access, hardware requirements and so on.

**JW:** *How do you see the database changing as a result of enlargement?*

**Mr V-A:** Obviously, it will have to expand and innovations are planned. The work of adding new language content is a lengthy process, with all the data – mostly produced in the countries

concerned – needing to be checked, then incorporated into the database. This takes time. Continual developments in information technology allow upgrading of the hardware to improve access times and expand the capacity of the system.

**JW:** *Is it your intention to maintain accessibility to the database in some form for all users, external as well as internal?*

**Mr V-A:** The hardware and software that provide access to the database were upgraded some two years ago and are in the process of further expansion for the purposes of the merger. This should mean that the server will be capable

of meeting demand in the medium-term. We are currently streamlining the content of the database, eliminating du-

plicate entries and so on, to make sure the resources are being used most efficiently. This is a very important task, as the facility is publicly funded and we must make the best possible use of public money. The other aspect of accessibility relates to the nature of the material held in the databases. Some EC databases are not presently open to the public. This matter will have to be agreed among the institutions involved.

**JW:** *We understand that the database is publicly funded and obviously this is not an inexhaustible resource. Is it the intention to make a charge for using the database in future?*

*"The facility is publicly funded and we must make the best possible use of public money"*

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# NCTA Board Report

## At the February meeting

- ▶ The Treasurer reported that the Association reached 73% of its projected annual membership income, compared with 47% at the same time last year.
- ▶ The date and content of the Tech 102 workshop were discussed.
- ▶ The general meeting agenda and election procedure were discussed.
- ▶ The database committee planned an extra meeting to discuss future plans for the website and database.
- ▶ Brigitte Reich was proposed as a replacement for Sonia Murray.

## At the February General Meeting

- ▶ Andrea Bindereif and Jennifer Liu Sadjadi were honored as honorary members.
- ▶ The Center for Art in Translation, Jungle Communications, A2Z Printing and Language Automation were awarded complimentary corporate memberships.
- ▶ The results of the elections were announced. Michael Metzger was elected to serve another term as president; Tuomas Kositiainen succeeded Marianne Pripps-Huertas as vice president; Blaine Stoddard succeeded Patricia Ramos as director; and Yves Avérous and Maren Taylor were re-elected as directors.
- ▶ The outgoing board members were honored.
- ▶ Four speakers discussed their different invoicing systems.

## At the February extraordinary board meeting

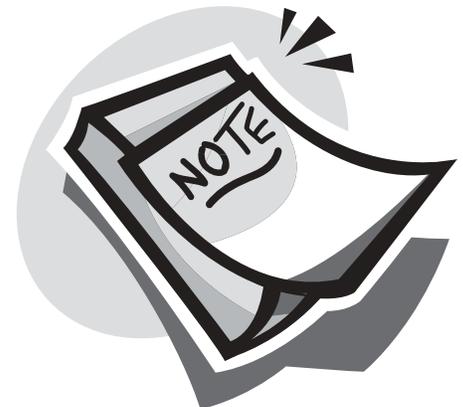
- ▶ This extraordinary meeting was called to examine the situation on the general mailing list.
- ▶ Board members expressed their opinions on the desired content type and management style that should be adopted from now on.
- ▶ It was decided to draft new posting guidelines and a listmaster job description, to be voted on at the next Board meeting.
- ▶ The Board decided to keep the list on moderated status until a conclusion is reached.

## At the March meeting

- ▶ The new board members were welcomed.
- ▶ The Translorial editor reported on the publication's progress and announced his resignation after the May issue.
- ▶ Workshop ideas and plans for the Board retreat were discussed.
- ▶ The Board voted to include the listmaster on the Board mailing list.
- ▶ The review of posting guidelines for the mailing lists continued. The Board drafted a poll to send out to the membership and voted to continue restricting content to translation/interpretation-related topics during the decision-making process.

## At the April meeting

- ▶ Replacement of the *Translorial* editor was discussed. The current editor explained duties and helped devise a plan for the transition.
- ▶ The board approved expenses for equipment rental and software purchase.
- ▶ The Tech 102 workshop outcome was presented.
- ▶ Details for the Board retreat were finalized.
- ▶ An effort to track and contact potential volunteers was discussed, with the search for a new advertising manager as first priority.



# NCTA Welcomes New Members

*(Joining January 15, 2003 – April 9, 2003)*

*Californians: someone to carpool with to the next meeting*

## Individual

---

(Working languages, other than English)

### **Nabil Abdelfattah**

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### **Nina F. Bhaisa**

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### **George A. Fowler**

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### **Manuela Garza**

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### **Peter Haas**

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### **Gurdeep Kaur**

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### **Marina E. Martinez**

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### **Salima Moalla**

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### **Pamela Gail Papas**

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### **Jannick M. Pitot**

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### **Kaj Rekola**

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### **Lillian N. Takeuchi**

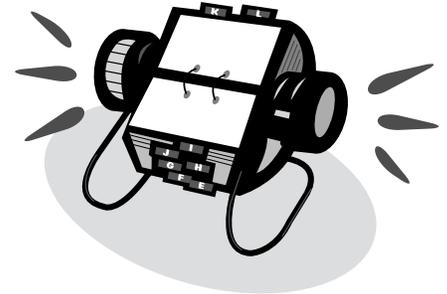
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### **Kayko Watanabe**

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### **Stanford Hospital Interpreter Services**

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# Best Face Forward: In-Person Marketing Skills For T&I Professionals

By Diane E. Teichman

*What else can you do to market your work, once you've mailed your resume to countless agencies, sent out brochures detailing your services, or paid dearly for a display advertisement? One of the best ways to promote your services, and one which you may have overlooked, is through chance meetings with potential clients. Potential rewards include a choice of subject matter, immediate availability should your services be needed, and the chance to learn how to troubleshoot through one-on-one client education. Here are a few steps to finding your most desirable clients in person and becoming your own best client magnet.*

When your goal is to secure new clients, try to attend the various gatherings where your preferred clients congregate. You can take advantage of the same networking opportunities as they do at their trade association meetings: most professions have some sort of association, and you can identify these by the titles or job descriptions of the people who hire you, then expand your scope by going to the next level of decision-makers in that field.

Often there are local chapters of national associations listed in the telephone book by their title under "Association." Such organizations often welcome guests at their meetings and lectures, so it is a good idea to check their event listings and confirm whether these events are open to the public. If their regular meetings are not open, there is always the possibility of attending one of their fundraisers or social functions.

Let's say, for example, that you would like more exposure to people who might hire you to translate engineering material. Check the listings of the American Council of Engineering Companies. Would you like more work in medical translation or interpreting? Look up the local chapter of the American Academy of Medical Administrators. Identify those professions which might also be on the lookout for the the same people you are soliciting and with whom you wouldn't be in competition: for example, if you are a literary translator, authors are also in the market for publishers. Are you a legal interpreter? Videographers and court reporters are constantly soliciting law firms. And every international association is a source of work for conference interpreters.

Other more general sources for potential clients are chambers of commerce, optimists clubs and after-hours networking groups.

Before you go to a professional event, do your homework. On the web you can learn about the field itself, along with related associations and their membership. Do you have any idea of the contracting or hiring capacity of the people you meet? The more relevant your services are, the more you can maximize a potential client's receptiveness to what you have to offer.

Be prepared to meet your potential clients face to face. In almost any business or social situation, when you are introduced to someone you have between 45 and 60 seconds to capture their interest. First impressions will be based on your appearance and the initial information conveyed, in other words, how you are introduced and the first thing you say. For the purposes of this article let's focus on potential clients for the translation and interpreting professions.

## *You have between 45 and 60 seconds to capture someone's interest*

Both translators and interpreters have to deal with a relatively uneducated clientele as a rule, so you want to be seen as an equal to the degree that you can. In a business setting you will want to be viewed as a serious professional, and in order to impress successful business people you will have to know what they value in a professional. They won't be impressed with the fact that when you are in the process of translating their novel or their quality control manual, you might actually be sitting at your computer dressed in sweats. Corporate employees, hospital adminis-



trators and lawyers who hire interpreters have to adhere to dress codes on a daily basis, and they need to know up front that you will dress appropriately if you work for them. At first glance, a potential client will be more inclined to hire a person who dresses professionally, because it signals respect for them and the work that they might offer you.

The next significant move is the introduction, whether you initiate it yourself or someone else does. Like the bold text in your display advertisement or the first few lines of your resume, the introduction will convey the most important elements a future client needs to know about you: your name and the service you provide. There is no need to mention your company name at this point, because you are still in that crucial 45-to-60-second window and even the catchiest company name would only distract from the achievement of your goal. Compare these two introductions:

*Hello, I'm Robert Waterman with Around the World Inc.*

*Hello my name is Robert Waterman, I'm a professional science and technology conference interpreter.*

A natural response is for clients to comment on your profession in relation to their own: how their business employs people like you, or what their most recent experience with a conference interpreter was. If they are unclear about what you do, they might ask you for more information.

Be careful to avoid the "lethal" introduction, which is when someone introduces you and misrepresents your services. Picture this scenario: here you are, already employed as senior translation project manager at a major company, but in the market for a better position. A former student of yours from the "make ends meet" days when you gave private lessons is about to introduce you to the human resources director of a Fortune 500 company. Imagine the irreparable consequences if you are introduced as his former Spanish teacher. The sixty-second window has closed, and you cannot tactfully correct this person who, after all, is doing you a great favor. To avoid this, a brief preliminary reminder to your former student will include the exact wording of your expertise and goals, such as "I really appreciate you introducing us, as I am looking to move on from my job as translation project manager at XYZ Inc."

If the potential client then expresses an interest in your work, remember to be brief. Be considerate of their time. This is where your progress in achieving your goal will be measured by every subsequent question a client might ask about your work. Design a single-sentence description of your key services in at most ten words. Offer your card as you are speaking and ask for the other person's card. If you've done your homework and know about their company, then show an interest in their work and compliment their company. Don't make comments on their work, such as the reasons for the problems they encounter with translation or interpreting; let them be the expert.

When you are asked about your own work, avoid personal aggrandizement. Calling yourself or your company the best, the oldest or the largest will only make you look foolish. Measure their interest in what you are saying by watching their body language and the

questions which follow. Are they fascinated by what you do or are they just being polite? Don't offer to meet with a potential client or send them more information about your services unless they express an interest in knowing more. It really stings to be told "No thank you, I'm not interested" to your face. You can contact them a few days later if you are not sure about their interest in your services. If at any time the conversation moves away from you or your services, be polite and don't bring it up again. You may have made a good impression already, and trying to refocus on yourself would only undo what progress you've made.

This is where your business card will be put to the professional litmus test. There is nothing more unprofessional than a cluttered business card. Information on the card should be limited to the company name, your name, phone numbers, e-mail and web address. If necessary, a description of services should be limited to a maximum of five words. A tagline under your logo serves the same purpose. Since

***There is nothing more unprofessional than a cluttered business card***

in today's business world a street address is no longer so relevant as contact information, omitting it can free up space on your card. Including the abbreviations of your professional memberships is also a sign of your dedication to your work.

You are now armed with the right appearance, the right script and the right approach. Now go out and get those clients!

*Diane E. Teichman is a licensed court interpreter and professional translator specializing in legal work. She is a member of ATA, NAJIT, HITA and AATIA and can be reached at [speakeasy@pdq.net](mailto:speakeasy@pdq.net) or [www.linguisticworld.com](http://www.linguisticworld.com).*

## The way ahead for Eurodicautom

*Continued from page 5*

**Mr V-A:** Just as I personally would like to see the database remain available for external users, I consider that it could remain free of charge. However, I do have to bear in mind the efficient use of public money, as I said, and the opinions of my colleagues and I cannot say definitively that there will never be a charge applied to the use of the database by the public.

**JW:** *The database is sometimes unavailable at peak times. Do the in-house users of Eurodicautom have priority access of some kind?*

**Mr V-A:** The very high demand for Eurodicautom means that the server cannot always cope with the number of users trying to access it. As I said, we are presently upgrading and streamlining the database to make it more efficient and improve access. Internal EC translators do indeed have priority access, so their work is not hindered by problems with the server.

**JW:** *What is the timetable for the changes to Eurodicautom and the merger with other databases? When do you expect the new system to be fully implemented?*

**Mr V-A:** The IT concept is currently being implemented and should be up and running by the middle of this year. After that, the new system will be launched and I would expect to see it operational by the end of the year.

I was very pleased to have the opportunity to explain the position to bulletin readers. It appears that the rumour that Eurodicautom would be no longer available began at a conference in Spain last year, when one of my colleagues was describing the changes, and some of those listening misunderstood

the proposals. The translation services of the European Union provided to all its institutions are very complex and are funded by

taxpayers' money. We therefore have to be sure that we operate as efficiently as possible, while providing a high level of service and quality primarily to the institutions of the EU. I am relatively new to this job, but you may be sure that I intend to pilot the plane well and that the Service is in safe and responsible hands.

You can log on to the Eurodicautom website at:

<http://europa.eu.int/eurodicautom/Controller>

*This article first appeared in the Bulletin of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting, March-April 2003.*

### Call for Submissions

#### **eXchanges**

*eXchanges* is the University of Iowa's literary e-journal devoted to translations both into and out of the English language. We aim to foster cultural interchange and expand awareness of translation as a valid art form. By publishing the source text alongside its translation, we also highlight the symbiotic nature of the process.

*eXchanges* features contemporary fiction, poetry and drama but will consider any quality submission sent our way.

We invite translations related to the theme of CITY & COUNTRY for our inaugural issue. Submissions of short stories, drama, novel extracts, and poetry are welcome.

Please send originals and translations of no more than 10 pages in length to [eXchanges-journal@yahoo.com](mailto:eXchanges-journal@yahoo.com) by August 15, 2003. Translators should have the necessary copyright permission.

#### *eXchanges*

425 English-Philosophy Building  
Iowa City IA 52242

# Is Technical Translation Really a Collaborative Activity?

By Steve Vitek

*"Whereas other translation services send their materials to professional translators who work in many fields, XYZ sends its translation projects to bilingual category experts—people who trained and worked in the field. Translations are reviewed by a second bilingual category expert for technical accuracy, and finally the translations are brought in-house where an editor reviews the document for readability. If graphics or formatting are required, that is also accomplished by a bilingual professional. All our translators and editors have advanced degrees (such as MDs, Ph.Ds, MHAs, RNs) in their fields, and virtually all are natives of the target language country...."*

*"There are five independent quality control points in our translation process, so we always certain that the documents being read replicate the intent and style of the original."*

—found on the website of a translation agency under the heading How we're different (including the "so we always certain" part)

There are several schools of thoughts on this subject. Some translators enjoy having their masterpieces dissected, criticized and/or praised by editors and/or colleagues. Beginners especially fall into this category, and for a very good reason. But most translators, including this one, dislike few things more than when other people try to change anything in their translation, other than fixing a typo or an omission. This article will attempt to explain the reasons why technical translation, and in particular translation of patents from foreign languages such as Japanese, German or French for litigation and filing purposes, is probably not a suitable candidate for the collaborative approach described in the blurb above—perhaps unlike translation in other fields such as software or operating manuals.

It always makes me laugh when I read statements such as the one above on the websites of translation agencies. If you run a search, you can easily find dozens of websites of agencies that are all "different" in the same way: they don't trust a hapless translator to translate anything accurately until his or her translation has been checked by another translator, then rechecked by yet another translator, then proofread by a proofreader who has at least a PhD., and then checked one more time "for readability" by yet another editor who is possibly God Herself. The assumption here seems to be that since more heads know more, the company will use as many heads as it takes, all of them incredibly wise heads, to attain The Perfect Translation. Why, even the graphics are input by a bilingual expert (this is optimal for superior scanning resolution). The XYZ agency above (having been brought up in the humanist tradition in the old country, I am not using their real name)

seems to display a healthy amount of contempt for us translators, given that they are in fact in the translation business. They don't use "translators who work in many fields" at all. They prefer "bilingual category experts"(whatever that means) who work in the field, presumably the one field that the bilingual category expert knows thoroughly.

We can probably assume that since these experts are not translators, they did not study the language for many years at a university but simply "picked it up" somehow. It is not really important how they "picked up the language"—a beautiful expression common in this country. In most other countries, people do in fact study languages rather than picking them up like a piece of unwanted garbage on the street. As long as they are not really translators, agency XYZ will trust these "bilingual experts" to know their languages. (When a doctor asks you next time, "How did you pick up your German, Ms. Interpreter" [misinterpreter], answer by saying: "How did you pick up your medicine, Doc?" Will he get it?)

So now we know that as far as the general public and some translation agencies are concerned, you don't really have to be a translator who has been studying languages all your life, has a degree in translation and has been putting his or her brain through mind-bending exercises in more languages and more highly technical subjects than just one for the last few decades. As long as you're a "bilingual category expert," you'll do.

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*Continued on page 12*

## Is Technical Translation Really a Collaborative Activity?

By Steve Vitek

*Continued from page 11*

### **Where have all those bilingual category experts been hiding all this time?**

The thing is, most of the time, there are no bilingual category experts around when you need them: that is, when you happen to be a hapless monolingual category expert, such as a patent lawyer or doctor who has to figure out what the heck is in that Japanese document that was just delivered by FedEx.

A bilingual category expert in my field would be a patent lawyer fluent at least in Japanese, German, and English, with a degree in chemistry or physics, etc. If he really knows his stuff and at the same time knows Japanese or German, he can be hired on the spot by any number of major patent law firms who deal with hundreds of patents and other documents in foreign languages, especially Japanese and German. The problem is, a good patent lawyer or MD, monolingual or trilingual, will make at least twice what a good technical translator can make, which is probably a good explanation of why not too many patent lawyers or doctors are clamoring to become translators. There may be some exceptions, but they are extremely rare. Thus, the only expert who really knows his stuff in several languages will usually be an experienced patent translator who has translated thousands of patents from a complicated language such as Japanese or German in a number of fields. If you find a good one, there is no need for five layers of additional checking and proofreading, because the highly technical material

will be translated accurately the first time. On the other hand, five layers of checking and proofreading, or twenty-five layers, are unlikely to result in an improved translation if the original translation was not accurate, even if any company could afford such wasteful use of the most important and most expensive asset that any business has—human intellect.

### **Too many cooks will spoil the broth**

Trying to change terms in a highly technical translation is about as wise as pulling bricks out of a house in order to replace them with bricks that look better to you. The problem is, the original construction will collapse if you pull out even a couple of bricks. Every translator makes hundreds of split-second decisions during his or her work. After the translation is finished, he or she must make dozens of additional instantaneous decision during proofreading. Whether these decisions are right or wrong will depend in part on how well he or she knows and understands the subject area and the terms, but that is only one part of the total package. The most important factor, in my opinion, is whether the person making these decisions is a good translator—a person who has the required education, skills and experience and who is also a good writer. Most bilingual experts are not translator material if they lack education emphasizing linguistic skills and translating experience. I once had to retranslate a biomedical patent that was "already translated" by a Japanese doctor who knew all the terms perfectly well

*"Every translator makes hundreds of split-second decisions during his or her work"*

and whose command of English was incredibly good for a Japanese person. This doctor would have made a superb translator, provided that money was not important to him. For some reason, though, his translation was really a summary rather than a translation. Some parts were left out and other parts were slightly rewritten, so that the resulting text was not really a translation of the patent but an edited version that was not accurate enough to be used for a patent filing in English in this country. I am not sure why he translated the patent the way he did, but I had to retranslate the whole thing before it could be with the US patent office.

### **When I see other people's translations, my first reaction is usually negative**

Although I try to translate as many of the patents that I receive from law firms myself, sometimes I send work to other people if I don't have time to finish everything myself. When I see other people's translations, my first reaction is usually negative. I realize that the main reason I don't like translations done by others is that their style is different from mine—but not necessarily wrong. Fortunately, I almost always work with people who are experienced translators that I have known for many years, and once I get used to their style, I hardly ever change anything in their work. Sometimes I fix an occasional typo or omission, but I consciously try not to go much beyond that because I respect the interpretation of the original by this particular translator. Who am I to say which nuances of interpretation are better and make more sense? Five layers of additional proofreading and editing would most likely destroy a good translation and would definitely not save a bad one, because nothing can. We know good translation when we see it. Why should we try to change a good thing? Except, perhaps, if we get paid for doing so by a dumb boss who thinks you can keep changing a good thing several times until you get an even better thing.

**Those who can translate usually translate, and those who can't ... edit**

Which is not to say that proofreading is not useful and in fact indispensable, even with an excellent translation. Everybody makes mistakes. But the concept that translation should be approached like a public meeting at the City Hall—we all put our heads together and arrive at the perfect solution in our collective wisdom—is fatally flawed.

This concept is, in my humble opinion, nonsense, even if it were economically feasible to have five qualified expert translators check a translation several times. Based on my experience over the past two decades here and in Japan, the reality is that coordinators and proofreaders who work for translation agencies are hardly ever expert translators.

The reason is similar to the reason why good patent lawyers and doctors don't usually become translators. While technical translators typically earn less than lawyers and doctors, a good translator of Japanese or German patents can easily make more than \$100 an hour when translating. Why would such a person want to make a fraction of that amount by checking other people's work, which is not nearly as interesting as translating? So what really happens is that those who can translate, translate, and those who cannot, edit. It is not unlike the dichotomy observed to exist in the writing profession: people who are good writers write books; people who like writing, but maybe are not that good at it, teach creative writing at college. Even if the editor is bilingual, which does not happen often in my language combinations, he or she will usually not be as good a translator as the one who actually translated the thing from the scratch. On the other hand, even a monolingual editor who knows a technical subject very well can catch potential mistakes in a translation, and when you deal with "exotic"

languages such as Japanese or Czech, your editor is likely to be monolingual.

I am not against proofreading and proofreaders. Several layers of collaborative proofreading do make sense in some cases. But there is a right way to do it, and then there is the way proudly featured in the website propaganda of a great number of agencies, which involves checking by layer upon layers of supposed experts who are not really translators. I sometimes get work from a small agency that organizes proofreading in an intelligent way. Because they always proofread my translations very carefully and nobody there knows Japanese or Czech, they sometimes call me with editing questions. One of the persons working there has a degree in biology and has actually worked in the field, so she is usually the one who proofreads my translation of biomedical patents. But if I ask them who is proofreading a huge biomedical monster patent—a hundred and fifty pages of DNA slicing and dicing—the answer is usually, "Oh, we all read it. We catch more mistakes that way." This is absolutely true, so long as the proofreaders realize that their job is to look for typos, inconsistencies and omissions, not to try to "improve" my translation. These people do, which is why I still work for them.

**Once we accept your translation, we're "stuck" with it**

It is thus quite important for a patent law firm to have access to a reliable translator who can be trusted to provide competent expert testimony in court about his translation or other translations done by other translators. The first question to a translator testifying about his translation will be, "Is this your translation?" When you are under oath, you had better tell the truth. Let us assume you have been hired by XYZ agency to translate a patent that hap-

pens to be crucial to a lawsuit. The agency has had your translation proofread by several proofreaders who have made significant changes instead of just correcting typos or omissions as a sane person would do. Since you are under oath, you would have to say, "Yes, I translated it, but I did not use these exact words. Somebody at the agency changed this word and that word. They check and edit all translation in five stages for readability. It is company policy". With this statement, your translation has just been rendered worthless as a crucial piece of evidence in a very expensive lawsuit.

On the other hand, a professional translator who translates in several fields, preferably from several languages, and who avoids agencies of the XYZ type like the plague, will be able to explain why a so-called causative mode construction followed by a mode called "renyokei" in Japanese was translated in a certain way into English. Such a translator will be able to explain these unique elements of Japanese grammar and compare his English translation to the translations of the same Japanese patent into French and German available on the websites of the respective countries' patent offices. Instead of trying to invalidate a translation by arguing that the Japanese word "ki" means device and not apparatus, or vice versa (it depends), or contesting the meaning of the Japanese word "mono" in this particular patent (it can mean almost anything you want it to, trust me), the lawyers will have to concentrate on the actual elements of the design rather than semantics.

Once a law firm accepts a certain translation, they are "stuck" with it, as one patent lawyer put it to me. That is why they sometimes have to go over it with the translator with a fine-tooth comb before submitting it as evidence. I was asked once to compare five different

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## Is Technical Translation Really a Collaborative Activity?

By Steve Vitek

*Continued from page 13*

translations of a patent, one of them mine, in order to establish the meaning of a single sentence. On another occasion, I was asked by a US inventor to translate a Japanese patent related to his invention. He told me that he was going to order at least three translations of the same Japanese patent because he believed that he had been provided with an incorrect translation. I remember a conference call with two patent lawyers who were going over my translation, looking for potential problems before submitting the translation as evidence. The patent was so complicated that two patent lawyers with two different professional backgrounds were needed to grill me for about an hour. It was not pleasant for me, but one thing that I learned about my work from that session is that a patent translator has to be responsible for his translation. He must be able to defend the meaning of every term, every sentence, and every word, based on his education and professional experience.

Only an experienced, professional translator can do that. A Bilingual subject expert, even if there were such a thing, would probably fail the test. Five such experts would most likely make a total mess of what might have been a good translation. Fortunately, we know that in reality these layers of bilingual experts who check and recheck everything five times do not exist.

*A full-length version of this article first appeared in the ATA Chronicle, April 2003. The author is interested in receiving e-mails from translators about this article. You can reach him at [stevevitek@pattran.com](mailto:stevevitek@pattran.com).*

# NCTA trdb Activity Report

By David Lakritz

Searches of NCTA's online translator database at [www.lai.com/ncta/trdb.htm](http://www.lai.com/ncta/trdb.htm).

First quarter 2003 (January 1–March 31, 90 days): during this period there were a total of 12,734 search requests (~141/day), a 45.4% increase from fourth quarter 2002.

Of these requests, 2.4% were specialty matches. The breakdown of these requests is shown in the table at the right (some requests were for multiple specialties).

The most requested language pairs are ranked in the table below.

### Most requested specialties

First quarter 2003		
65	21%	Arts/Humanities
59	19%	Law
55	18%	Software
51	16%	Business
50	16%	Medicine
41	13%	Engineering
36	12%	Computers
35	11%	Electronics
30	10%	Biology
21	7%	Chemistry
18	6%	Finance

### Top 20 languages requested

First quarter 2003					
From English INTO:		Into English FROM:		Other languages FROM>INTO	
689	Spanish	456	Spanish	40	German>French
375	French	327	German	36	German>Spanish
295	German	300	French	32	German>Italian
264	Chinese	180	Chinese	31	Polish>German
196	Japanese	174	Arabic	30	German>Polish
153	Italian	149	Japanese	30	Dutch>French
142	Greek	135	Latin	28	Spanish>Croatian
134	Arabic	120	Dutch	27	French>Spanish
131	Swedish	103	Italian	27	French>German
122	Russian	98	Swedish	25	Dutch>German
119	Portuguese	86	Russian	22	German>Turkish
115	Dutch	83	Portuguese	21	French>Dutch
87	Korean	71	Polish	20	Italian>Spanish
78	Polish	58	Danish	20	German>Dutch
70	Turkish	57	Greek	19	Croatian>German
68	Hindi	52	Turkish	19	Chinese>Croatian
67	Vietnamese	51	Finnish	18	Swedish>Spanish
62	Thai	49	Romanian	18	Spanish>French
58	Finnish	49	Norwegian	17	Croatian>Spanish
56	Indonesian	46	Vietnamese	16	Spanish>Portuguese

# About the NCTA mailing lists

NCTA offers three mailing lists to its members: a general, French and Spanish one. Members can use these lists to share information and ask each other questions. Please read the usage guidelines for posting to the list, below. These guidelines were revised on May 12, 2003, based on input received through a member survey.

Follow these URLs and sign in with your Yahoo username (you can create a username if you don't have one already):

NCTA-Members home page:  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ncta-members>

EntreNous home page:  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/entrenous>

CiberTertulia home page:  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cibertertulia>

## NCTA Members List Terms of Use

### I. Description/Purpose of List

The NCTA Members List ("List") is a private mailing list. Access is restricted to members of the Northern California Translators Association (NCTA).

The NCTA Members List serves as a forum to share ideas of interest to our profession: to ask for advice/help, to suggest new or interesting sources of information, to announce special events, and to discuss technical and computer topics and other professional issues.

### II. Instructions for Use

1. Members must use their full names when subscribing to the list.

2. To respond to a posted message, use 'Reply.' Remember that your reply will be sent automatically to everyone on the list.

3. Address your response to the writer of a message rather than to the list if you wish to respond privately or if your reply is of interest only to you and the message sender.

4. Use the appropriate subject keyword as described in the **List Etiquette**. You may use those keywords to filter or sort messages. Your email program (Outlook, Eudora, Netscape, etc.) enables you to set rules or filters that can help you to keep your mailbox free of messages that you deem undesirable.

5. To maintain the thread on a particular topic, use 'Reply.' Quote a relevant portion of the original posting, or simply refer to it. Avoid trailing messages in the body of your message.

6. The List does not accept attachments to messages. However, the List website does provide space to store uploaded files that are accessible to all subscribers. Alternatively, you may send files privately or provide links in your messages to items seen on the Web. Avoid forwarding the entire item or article to the List.

7. To receive all the List messages of the day as one daily digest, use the self-service feature on the group home page.

▶ Go to  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ncta-members/>.

▶ On the far right of the screen, click on "Edit My Membership."

▶ Under Message Delivery, choose: "Daily digest: send many emails in one message."

▶ Click on the "Save changes" button.

8. To respond to a posting included in a digest message, *start a new message*. Type 'RE:' in the Subject field, followed by the subject of the posting, and refer to, or cut and paste in your message, the relevant portion of the posting you are replying to. Replying directly to a digest message imposes a burden on the List.

9. To locate a message posted in the past, go to the List's website. All messages posted since the List's inception are archived and searchable at that location.

10. Vacation or temporary holds: To suspend your mail for a few days, use the self-service feature on the group home page. (You don't need to have the Listmaster unsubscribe you from the group).

▶ Go to  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ncta-members/>.

▶ On the far right of the screen, click on "Edit My Membership."

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## About the NCTA mailing lists

*Continued from page 15*

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- ▶ Under "Message Delivery," choose the last delivery option: "No email. Don't send me email. I'll read the messages at the Web site."
- ▶ Click on the "Save Changes" button.
- ▶ Upon your return, you can reactivate the delivery of message by going to the same page and choosing the first delivery option: "Individual emails. Send individual email messages."

### III. Policy

1. By subscribing to the List you are confirming that you have read and are agreeing to the terms of the NCTA Members List Terms of Use.

2. Since this is a private list, no message posted by others on the List may be forwarded electronically or otherwise to anyone who is not a subscriber to the NCTA Members List without the originator's permission.

3. With the consent of the contributor, the NCTA reserves the right to publish contributions to the List for promotional or educational purposes.

4. Any member forwarding a message to the List should verify the accuracy of the message before posting it.

5. Copyrighted material may not be forwarded to the List without the consent of the author.

6. List members agree to observe the guidelines of the List Etiquette at all times.

7. The NCTA Board of Directors has designated a Listmaster. The Listmaster may remind members, off-list, to respect those guidelines when the members seem to be ignoring the List Etiquette. The Listmaster also has the discretion to moderate the list. In the event of serious and/or repeated violation of the guidelines, the Listmaster may unsubscribe a member upon approval of the Board.

Moderation of the list includes the right to withhold messages that do not conform to these Terms of Use. In that event, the Listmaster will inform the member that his or her messages are being withheld. Should the member disagree with the Listmaster's action, he or she may request mediation by the Board.

### IV. List Etiquette (Dos and Don'ts)

#### Dos

- ▶ Show respect and tolerance in your contributions.
- ▶ Use one of the following keywords at the beginning of the subject line of each message:

INFO - News and events

WORK - Professional topics, job postings

COMP - Hardware, software, resources, links

TERM - Terminology resources and questions (mention the target country and domain in the subject field)

- ▶ Please post your messages primarily in English so that they will be accessible to all list members.
- ▶ Keep your postings in conformity with the main purpose of the List as described in Section I. If you think your message might be perceived as off-topic by fellow members, keep it as brief as possible and/or link to external sources.
- ▶ When quoting, copy only the portion of the message to which you are replying.
- ▶ Delete trailing messages when replying to a thread of messages.

#### Don'ts

- ▶ Do not use the list as a community forum or billboard for postings that depart from the purpose of the list as described in Section I.
- ▶ Do not send personal messages.
- ▶ Do not mention specific rates when writing about prices (such discussions are prohibited by the ATA Policy Statement of Mar. 25, 1990).
- ▶ Do not post copyrighted material, commercial programs, shareware or freeware.
- ▶ Do not use all caps (this is considered impolite).
- ▶ Do not use obscene, blasphemous, or pejorative language about any race, culture, or individual.
- ▶ Do not forward chain letters or unverified virus notices.
- ▶ Do not use the NCTA Members list as a vehicle to vent personal disagreements with other members.

**Advertising Manager wanted**

NCTA needs a volunteer to manage advertisements in our quarterly publication, *Translorial*. If you can spare the time to gain experience you can't buy anywhere else, please contact us.

The job: *Translorial* is published four times a year, has a circulation of about 600 and carries several pages of advertisements in each issue. The advertising manager actively seeks out new advertisers, serves as the direct contact between advertisers and NCTA, and works closely with the editor and production staff to coordinate timely placement of advertisements.

Who to talk to: contact Michael Metzger by e-mail ([president@ncta.org](mailto:president@ncta.org)) or telephone (415) 346-5529



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Deadline for next issue: August 10, 2003

See you at the next  
NCTA General Meeting

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