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GALA Cascais: Passion networking anno 2011

What defines a good conference? Well, having never been the greatest of conference goers I'm hardly qualified to judge, but nevertheless I'm willing to flaunt my ignorance of such matters and declare: "GALA Cascais 2011 was a good conference."

This despite some of the trump cards not living up to their Great Expectations: the Portuguese weather gods sulked, only easing up when the Madding Crowd had dispersed; the Tools' Bonanza fizzled, spluttered and died; a few of the GALA faithful were not at their ebullient best this time round; and the biggest gripe of all – Dear Presenters, too many of you had loaded your slides with more bullet points than a Spaghetti Western, and then went on to belabour your audience by reading them ad verbum. We came to watch and listen to you, with a backing section of stimulating slides. We can all read and don't need your help in that department.

OK – one more thing while I'm in the bitchy corner: you hungry young men with the hard sell tactics ('*Our product can do everything short of flying you to the moon*'): you're selling your wares to a bunch of artfy-farty linguists who would be more impressed by a subtle reference to Proust – or just doing something 'silly' like naming your company after your daughter rather than yet another meaningless acronym. I'm sure your products are great, but overselling is more likely going to scare away than convince such a bunch of old cynics.

All right: Now for the good stuff. We got off to an emotive start with brief comments from Japanese and Egyptian colleagues about the recent events in their countries. Their heartfelt words certainly put everything else in perspective.

These were followed by a good keynote address that got us thinking new thoughts (the main goal of attending conferences?), first by looking back and then pointing us towards future horizons. Jochen Hummel (*ESTeam AB*) was like an old circus horse returning to the arena – and several participants admitted their main reason for attending was to hear Mr. Trados' comeback speech. With an equal measure of charm, self-deprecation and ideas, Jochen didn't let us down. His comments on the need to combine technical innovation with business innovation were especially interesting. He also hinted at something that was taken up by Lori Thicke (*Translating without Borders*) on the Wednesday: an inference (let's leave it as no more than that) that 80% of the audience (the LSPs) were superfluous to requirements. Basically, clients require a service that is supplied by translators, and LSPs are no more than mere middle managers. What if the two halves could throw out all those people taking themselves too seriously and currently thinking they occupy centre stage? Now that would be true lean management! Perhaps we antiquated LSP owners should be taking a closer look at clouds and crowds before we go out of business ...

Then we got down to the serious business of deciding who and what to listen to. There was never a dull moment (well there was, but you know what I mean), and several participants were heard venting their exasperation over not being able to be in two places at the same time – comments that spoke volumes of the range of options open to us.

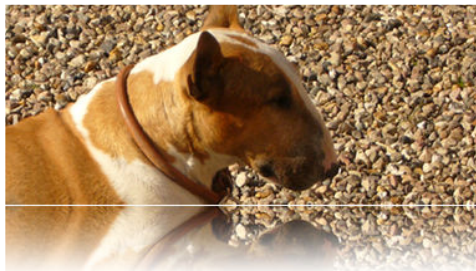
Passion Management is the flavour of the year and, with GALA as the catalyst, lots of people were willing to share their passion for our industry and where it's heading.

The networking was, as our American friends would say, 'awesome'. I met colleagues out jogging at seven in the morning and there was still a crowd in the bar at midnight where the talk was always more important than the booze. So, 17-18 hour days were the norm for me from Sunday to Wednesday, Jesper Sandberg (*STP Nordic*) and I having the dubious honour of closing the conference's bar activities early Thursday morning ...



GALA itself wanted to get into the 'news' act and used the conference to announce that it was taking up the standards' mantle after the demise of LISA. Will this mark the coming of age of the GALA organisation or are standards a cold, heavy lump of ice on which unsuspecting, well-built associations founder? It will be exciting to see where this initiative takes us.

Personally, one of the highlights of the conference, and a quintessential example of what these events are all about, was Jörgen Danielsen's (*Eule Lokalisierung*) *Asking the Right Questions about Machine Translation*. Those 40 minutes on Tuesday afternoon were worth the entire trip, so thanks for that Jörgen. I for one have already downloaded your slides and will be using them actively as my company takes up the MT gauntlet during the ensuing years. At one stage you reminded me of a report I'd read about becoming a dog owner. It's not the initial price tag that should worry you (and Brutus, my English bullterrier didn't come cheap!); the real cost is in the upkeep. I wonder how many of us are actually both big enough and savvy enough to meet that long-term cost.



Jörgen, as Jochen Hummel before him, also spoke of the likelihood of CAT and MT tools merging in the non-too distant future, which brings me one final word of praise for Herr Danielsen. He used the 'I' word: Integration. Connecting systems and know-how is the key: your systems have to talk to each other, and if they don't you have a problem. Simple as that really.

Another prophet of integration was in Cascais in the shape of Bob Donaldson (*Carson Strategy Group*). Bob's *Agnostic Tools Evaluation* was the best little workshop/panel discussion that I got involved in, with several people around the table willing and able to participate in a good debate while Bob retained order and kept the wheels spinning. His slide No. 7 is, despite its supposed many years of use, still a super overview of all the 'bits' required to run an LSP. Thanks for that, Bob.



Don DePalma (*Common Sense Advisory*) was full of facts 'n' figures, many of which were highly interesting. What about, for example, the fact that there are 25,000 LSPs worldwide, i.e. we remain a much fragmented industry. On the other hand those 25,000 companies are no doubt working hard at winning their share of a 27 billion euro business (expected turnover in 2015), and have already partitioned the 13.5% increase in the market in 2010. Some of the new kids in town are also starting to represent serious figures: 525 million euro worth of post editing and 400 euro of transcreation speak louder than words that the times they are a changin'.

Perhaps the information that was most hands-on from Don was the conclusion that it seems a drop in the consumer confidence index can be linked directly to a resulting fall in business among language providers. Perhaps we'd be wise to remember Don's stats just before the next slump ...

One of the marks of a confident organisation is that you plan an event that goes out just as strongly as it starts, and GALA certainly achieved this in the form of Serge Gladkoff's (*Logrus*) cleverly put together panel for the very last session in the main hall entitled: *For Sale? Straight Talk About Mergers and Acquisitions*. Serge had representatives from the Old World (Dimitri Stoquart, *Stoquart SA* from the *TextMinded* group) and the New World (Smith Yewell *Welocalize* and Thomas Pennell *TransPerfect Translations*). My only criticism: it would have been great if there were also someone there from the BRIC countries, but you can't have everything and the panel had, for the most part, the audience hanging on their every word. At one stage I almost LOL'ed. I think it was the far from Quiet American, Thomas Pennell, who asked how many company owners were in the room and something like 95% of the audience raised their hands. No wonder they were listening carefully!

Personally, I made a lot of notes – even though I'm not interested in being bought up at this stage, gentlemen! – which included the following:

- The economics comes before anything and everything else
- Buyers want top staff to stay on, and sellers normally do so for 2-3 years after a sale
- The first time you attempt to buy another company it's really difficult
- People (= owners) always think their companies are worth more than they are
- What's the governance situation? Negotiate this in place before closure so that you don't become extremely disappointed afterwards
- Talk to Smith and Thomas as there's a good chance that if you have something worth buying they'll be interested!
- You need a 100-day plan for integrating a new acquisition (bit like Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn ...)
- Get to know more than one person from the buying company
- Key factors over and above your ability to grow and make money are: 1) geography, 2) competency, and 3) client base
- CFOs and HR managers are shown the door after a buyout
- The best prices come from ignorant buyers ...

GALA Board Member Arturo Quintero (*Moravia*) was up like a Jack-in-the-box after the debate, assuring the hungry hoards of owners (and sellers?!) that GALA would be sure to follow up on this one, so let's make sure we keep him to his promise.

Then, as the sun finally checked in, Xavier Maza (*iDISC*) and yours truly were given the pleasure of rounding off the proceedings and checking everyone out. Next stop? Monte Carlo in 2012.

Monte Carlo?! "You must be mad," I hear you say. "What self-respecting LSP is going to send people to Monte Carlo?" But hey: the more I think of it the more I like it. Why the hell not? I'd have sent you to Florence or Yasnaya Polyana, so count yourselves lucky you have a gutsy Board. I for one am packing a tuxedo!

Robert Etches, CEO
EICOM, a TextMinded company
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