

Centralizing localization resources at Yahoo!



Yahoo! Inc., founded in 1994, is currently the third most visited website on the planet with over half a billion unique visitors every month. Yahoo! is headquartered in Sunnyvale, California, has more than 13,000 employees in 25 countries, provinces and territories, and localizes content into over 30 languages. Salvatore Giammarresi is Yahoo!'s localization director, hired to reinvent Yahoo!'s localization strategy, processes, organization and technology.



Salvatore Giammarresi,
Yahoo!

Thicke: You have one of the most varied backgrounds that I have encountered in the localization industry. What got you into this field?

Giammarresi: All my life I have been fascinated by languages, cultures and how people communicate through various mediums. My first steps in this field were as a freelance Italian <> English translator while I was in college in Italy studying languages and linguistics. When I moved to Silicon Valley in the early 1990s, I was naturally pulled into software localization. Later, I was invited by the University of Palermo in Italy as a visiting professor to teach about localization and computer-assisted translation tools. At one point in my career I was fortunate enough to get a Ph.D. in applied linguistics. Besides being the perfect ground for applying many of the insights I gathered throughout my academic career, I think localization is one of the coolest professions because to be really successful you need to be highly cross-functional, combining deep expertise in finance, product management, project management, people management, vendor management, engineering, computer science, portfolio management, sales, legal, marketing, quality assurance, operations, translation and linguistics. Because localization touches all functional teams within an organization, it gives you a unique perspective on a company. If used wisely, this perspective

can be very influential.

Thicke: Can you give me an example?

Giammarresi: Very few teams in a company have the operational horizontal reach that a centralized localization team has. Because of this, the localization team can be a catalyst for the cross-pollination of ideas, can promote company-wide changes and can improve the overall operational setup of a company by proposing optimizations that vertical teams or teams with a smaller range of action can rarely detect. For these reasons, localization managers play a key role in a company.

Thicke: Do you think localization managers have the tendency to be underappreciated in their companies, and, if so, what should they do?

Giammarresi: I think it's a combination of where localization is situated in the organizational chart of a company, the extent of influence the localization manager has and the overall value a company gives to its localization efforts. At Yahoo!, localization is viewed as a driver for growth. The localization team is positioned high on the company's priorities chart and has a wide range of influence over strategy and process.

Thicke: How about localization itself? Do you think it flies too often under the radar?

Giammarresi: It depends on the company's goals and philosophy. For most companies it's an afterthought. As such, it's under the radar. Localization managers have a chance to put localization on the map for their companies, just as I do at Yahoo! Localization managers need to expand their areas of expertise and work hand in hand with engineering, product management, finance and the executives in their companies.

Thicke: And why Yahoo!?

Giammarresi: Yahoo! is a dream come true for me. I love working at Yahoo! It's one of the best-known brands on the

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web, and our websites are among the most visited on earth, touching the lives of millions of people every day across the globe. I feel this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me and my team. It doesn't happen often that you get a chance to actively participate in a localization team for the world's premier digital media company as it embarks on building its business all over the planet. I am proud to say that over a short period of time, my team and I are already having a huge impact.

Thicke: What are the biggest challenges that you have faced coming to work for such a high-profile technology company?

Giammarresi: The biggest challenge is to manage change at many levels while keeping a huge production engine running. We have 680 million customers all around the world, and we want them to have an amazing, consistent experience. We also have a fantastic opportunity to institute some new localization practices. The key is to balance the opportunity for change while making sure we keep the website that all these users love consistent.

Thicke: You've been with Yahoo! for a relatively short time, but it seems like you've accomplished a lot. What is your biggest innovation to date?

Giammarresi: I have been at Yahoo! for almost a year and a half now. Looking at the accomplishments of my team, indeed it does feel like I have been here for a longer time! The single biggest innovation so far has been centralizing all human, financial and vendor localization resources across the entirety of Yahoo! into a central group, which allows us to take a deliberate and standardized approach as we grow the business.

Thicke: Why is it important to centralize?

Giammarresi: I don't believe that centralization is the answer to everything, and every company is different. However, when I looked at Yahoo!'s localization setup, it was clear to me that there would be major benefits from shifting toward a centralized structure. Centralization of localization allows Yahoo! to rationalize our costs, improve time-to-market, improve the quality of our products, be more agile and localize more products in less time. It's really about agility and scalability. Basically, being centralized enables us to ship products globally in the most efficient,

effective way possible, which in turn allows us to deliver products that are not just translated, but in fact are deeply personal digital experiences for every one of our users, no matter where they are. That is the real opportunity, and this is what makes my job fun and exciting every day.

Thicke: In my day job as CEO of Lexcelera, few of our enterprise clients have centralized translation services, with everything associated with that: not knowing what their translation spend is, unoptimized and wildly inconsistent translation memories, many contacts, and sometimes different people asking for the same texts to be translated. Why do you think most buyers still live with a decentralized approach despite these obvious issues?

Giammarresi: These decentralization issues prosper when people think in terms of "what is best for my team" and not "what is best for our company." They also happen because localization is in many cases an afterthought, rather than being seen as a global strategic growth driver. That can change. At Yahoo! everyone is aware of the growth impact of properly planned localization. The "globalization and localization of our platforms and products" is one of Yahoo!'s strategic priorities. "Build for global reach with local flexibility" is one

of Yahoo!'s operating principles.

Thicke: You seem to be putting together a team of many of the top people from our industry. What challenges, if any, have you faced in recruiting?

Giammarresi: I am very fortunate to have a great team. We are continuously interviewing for great talent. We have an amazing opportunity to offer. The international expansion of what is already an amazing digital media business at Yahoo! is really exciting. No one has the breadth and depth of content and media assets we have, and a major company focus is to expand on those assets in new and emerging markets. It's an unparalleled opportunity when it comes to localization.

Thicke: So, where should someone apply?

Giammarresi: Go to www.careers.yahoo.com and search for "localization" or send me an e-mail with your resume.

Thicke: Here's a question just for fun: Do you get free food at Yahoo!?

Giammarresi: We don't get free food daily, but we have a lot of fun and regular parties on campus with free food, and there are all the free lattes, cappuccinos and espressos you can drink. We work hard, and we know how to party. I am happy to report that we have a lot of foodies on our team. **M**