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Translators without Borders

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Traducteurs sans frontières, the French predecessor to Translators without Borders, was founded in 1993 as a way to provide free translations to humanitarian organizations. In the past year, since the crisis in Haiti hit in early 2010, thousands of translators have volunteered their services to help not only the people of Haiti but those in other troubled regions of the world. This has given us the impetus to expand our role in supporting humanitarian actions worldwide. Technology is absolutely vital to allowing us to automatically match this pool of willing translators with the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) that need their skills.

The technology platform we are designing is fully automated and provides infinite scalability for Translators without Borders. With some of the best minds in our industry on board, we are creating a frictionless platform for managing the whole process, from sourcing translators — in our case, volunteer translators — to testing and approval. It also seamlessly and automatically posts projects that translators accept and deliver, all without the heavy lifting of human project management. We're doing this today, with a platform created for us by ProZ.com.

What happens next is even more exciting. We're adding translation memory (TM), machine translation (MT) and terminology management to our automated process, and setting up separate workflows for NGO projects, whether a document, voice file or video to subtitle. In our vision of the future for the translation industry, the technologies are merged, within the same workflow. So, for example, TM combined with MT and terminology management instead of using separate processes for each step along the way.

The end goal is a web-based, self-managing community. Here we see the glimmer of the future where those who require translations, whether NGOs or multinationals, interact directly with their own communities of translators rather than relying on a middleman to manage the process and take a share for doing so. LSPs can become facilitators of this process – which will happen online and instantaneously rather than pass from hand to hand to hand.

Crowdsourcing is another critical element in scaling capacity, and with the power of the crowd we intend our platform to also serve people and organizations in the developing world who wish to make knowledge available in local languages. We see translation helping bridge the knowledge divide to empower people, communities and even countries. With life-saving and life-enhancing information available in the languages of the people who need it most, then knowledge will be truly democratized. Translation combined with technology will get us to that destination.