

The ProZ.com saga

As seen by an early user/member/moderator (1749)

Lonely translators brought together

Once upon a time there was a freelance translator. He was like every freelance translator sitting alone in his attic, translating Japanese into English. One day he got a brilliant idea. This 'Internet' could maybe be used for networking translators with their clients and with their colleagues, creating a separate universe for them and everyone interested in translation, linguistics, languages and interpreting.

His name was **Henry Dotterer**.



He was not rich, he **only** had a very worthwhile idea. What to do about it? Well, he knew some programming himself. He also had friends who did.

But above all, he had an idea well thought through.

So what did he do?

Well he rolled up his sleeves and started working on it.

Somehow he raked up enough money to launch the new site ProZ.com in August 1999. As time went on he had to invest considerable amounts to rent and buy powerful servers with accompanying potent hard disks and mirror hard disks, all necessary to guarantee a safe, well-functioning 24 hour service, all essential to the growing community of translators, interpreters and outsourcers.

The ProZ.com was early on the Internet but still had to compete then as now with several competitors, 'me too' and wannabe sites. **As it has turned out ProZ.com was and is second to none, however you measure it.**

It was unique in a number of ways:

1. It was the first and only web site with free access and above all FREE use. Many of us of course rushed to register for a service that seemed so interesting and was free.
2. Its vision was new and stimulating: It was set out to be a site where users/members could have 'an on-line workplace' and a 'home', where they could meet with clients (jobs) but more importantly with colleagues with whom they could interact, cooperate, share info and have fun.
3. Within the first few years there were also a lot of 'goodies' appeared like KudoZ, BrowniZ, forums, 'Featured translator', not to forget the 'Search for a translator' function (Today: 'Directory').
4. The most surprising and appealing fact to us 'early ones' was that the site was so open (no screening, no proving X number of years of experience, no demands to prove that you are a 'professional' translator or that you have a certificate etc), expressing the simple principle: **It is up to the translator to prove his/her qualities vis-a-vis potential clients.**
5. **Sensational:** ProZ.com does not ask for a commission. **Unheard of at the time (Still is).**

**Henry did not fall into the pitfalls of doing the opposite of what he did.
(His not so successful competitors still make the errors he did NOT make).**

We, the early registrants, were of course, surprised and grateful for all we got but we had one great fear: **How the heck is he going to finance this whole operation?**

From 1999 to 2001 ProZ.com consisted of Henry plus a young person and we were all worried how this would all end.

We couldn't help thinking that so few people managing this world-wide operation was definitely too little. We could not see how enough financing could be arranged when commission was not used.

But new ideas emerged: Wouldn't it be reasonable for us to pay some sort of membership fee for all we got? **-Yes it would!**

Premium and Platinum memberships were launched at some 60 and 120 USD and over time, enough members paid for membership to put the company on solid financial footing. We all rejoiced and some of us paid or wanted to pay for several years at a time, thus expressing psychological and financial support,

ProZ.com is today, thanks to this model, a financially sound company with some 25 employees in three offices (Syracuse HQ, La Plata and Kharkov). Who would have thought that in 2002?

The number of registered users is today more than a quarter million which ought to be one of the largest professional professional communities in the world. The number of members is now public for the first time: 15000.

ProZ.com goes off-line

One important step in strengthening the community aspect of ProZ.com was the then daring suggestion by passionate ProZ.com Italian anchor and moderator, Angela Arnone, to organize an off-line **conference** in 2001. She got the idea when communicating with Italian colleagues:

Why don't we meet face-to-face to network and get to know each other personally?

It quickly became the



Angela Arnone

1st International ProZ.com conference.

(<http://www.proz.com/conference/4> wrong number eh) eh? ;-))

She and Roberta Anderson single-handedly organized a super conference at the pleasant seaside resort Porto-Santo-Stefano, Tuscany.



50+ attendees



Roberta Anderson

The succes of Porto-Santo-Stefano paved the way for further international conferences organized by a row of ProZ.com giants:



2nd International ProZ.com conference in Oxford 2004

3

(<http://www.proz.com/conference/1>)

organized by Henry and the Italian moderator

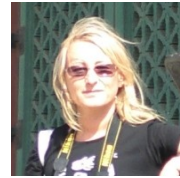
Gianfranco Manca

3rd International ProZ.com conference in Krakow 2005

(<http://www.proz.com/conference/2>)

organized by Polish moderator

Magda Dziadosz



4th International ProZ.com conference in Buenos Aires 2006

(<http://www.proz.com/conference/5>)

organized by Argentine moderator

Aurora Humarán

5th International ProZ.com conference in Budapest 2007

(<http://www.proz.com/conference/10>)

organized by Hungarian moderator



Csaba Ban



6th International ProZ.com conference in Ohrid 2009

(<http://www.proz.com/conference/91>)

organized by Macedonian freelance translator

Hristina Dojčinova

Each of the conferences has been initiated and organized by enthusiast fiery ProZ.com members giving back to the community what they had received and appreciated so much.

The Porto-Santo-Stefano success initiated the creation of powwows and regional conferences. Since 2002 some many many hundreds of powwows have been held in more than 80 countries. It is estimated that more than 10000 translators have met each other face to face at these events. Thousands more have attended some of the 17 regional conferences, held in 13 countries.

(http://www.proz.com/conference/?show_mode=past_conferences)

1951 events (powwows & conferences) have taken place or are planned.

In 2002 **Angela Arnone** suggested and organized with the undersigned the **first ever moderator meeting** in London creating a great camaraderie among moderators and giving Henry a lot of policy input. This event had a follow-up at Sitges, Spain in 2003, initiated and organized by British/Catalan moderator



Berni Armstrong

At those meetings we exchanged a lot of views, which we could then use of in the ensuing on-line communication on the Moderator Forum.

The latest moderator meeting was organized by **Magda Dziadosz** in Warsaw February 2009.

ProZ.com: Place #1 for translators and clients to meet 4

From early on, the jobs area was an important facet of ProZ.com, in two ways:

1. Outsourcers could specify for themselves what their needs were and could, with great precision, find several well documented translators which they could then approach for a discussion about an upcoming job.
2. They could also post a job in the Jobs section. Eventually, these job postings became subject to vetting by job moderators or site staff members helping to see to it that jobs were properly specified (What?, When?, Time frame? Etc).

This very important job was taken on and excellently performed for several years by the two moderators



Ralf Lemster & Giuliana Buscaglione

later to be joined by **Magda Dziadosz, Özden Arikan, Uldis Liepkalns, Jerzy Czopic** and others.

Their dedication and conscientiousness is to be remembered by the site with gratitude.

One important function in the Jobs section was the creation of the so-called Blue Board (suggested by Sven Petersson), which stimulates outsourcers to behave fairly and to pay on time. The Blue Board gives translators a basis for decision-making and negotiation. Despite misgivings at the launch, the Blue Board has worked out extremely well and is a very cherished function.

Here too Ralf, Giuliana and other moderators made outstanding contributions.

ProZ.com: The world's largest on-line workplace

ProZ.com may well be the largest on-line workplace for individuals, "on line workplace" being a place where the exchange of information serves professional purposes of those individuals. Each day 24/7, the year round thousands of users, hundreds or thousands are logged in, all depending on day and hour.

ProZ.com is ranked No 3,386 on the Alexa list of Internet traffic.

As a home and workplace for its members and users, ProZ.com processes thousands of questions within the KudoZ question/answer service (1999-2009: **2 million 223881** questions), posted jobs (**208872** jobs in total), forum postings (**702144** total), many articles (669 in total), **hundreds** of services offered via its market venue EXCHANGE.

Many jobs are NOT processed via the Jobs section. Instead, often overlooked by newbies and outside observers, the outsourcer searches and finds a translator by using the directory function.

The number of such jobs is not known, absolutely or in relation to posted jobs, but it is certainly impressive, to some extent verified by the steady inflow of new members .

In the early days of ProZ.com we all had the great feeling of being a cooperative community, even a great family. We enjoyed this thanks to Henry's openness, long leash and exemplary easygoing leadership style. He was always very open to suggestions we made (although at the time he often did not have the resources to implement them ;-)). When he was criticized I many times admired his patience and open-mindedness. He always answered criticism with respect and often acted on it. For all his easygoing leadership style he still had a firm vision which helped him to formulate firm rules for good site behavior.

One such rule was the NO POLITICS rule which was derived from his vision of ProZ.com as being a "tranquil place concentrating on the life and needs of translators, interpreters and linguist **to be shielded from the storms and turbulence of the outside world**".

In view of the fact that we all belong to a variety of cultures, religions and political beliefs I believe, and I think one can say, that it has been proven, that this decision of his was a very wise one!

From many forum and moderator discussions a scope and "law of the land" for ProZ.com gradually emerged and that framework helps us all to interact in a mutually rewarding manner.

The creative phase of the ProZ.com community has gradually matured into an everyday working community and ProZ.com has become a stable well financed company with enough staff resources to handle the steadily growing numbers of all aspects of the site.

Although ProZ.com has become more and more like other established 'companies', I think it still remains a very vibrant community.

If we want it to remain vibrant and creative, we are all called upon to contribute to the cooperative spirit which so well is serving us.

6. Surrounded by alternatives:

Will ProZ.com and the translator profession survive?

ProZ.com and the future of translation.

This section is not for me to speculate on. I trust Henry will elaborate on it, like he did at the ProZ.com conference in Kharkov, October 2008.

My personal belief:

What successfully began will successfully continue!

Happy 10th anniversary, Henry, staff and ProZ.com!

Kindest regards and a Happy New Decade!

Mats Wiman, Sweden
(User 1999, member 2000, moderator 2001)

