The Four Stages of Translation Agency Growth

XTRF

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XTRF Translation Management Systems

XTRF is one of the most popular and fastest-growing management systems for translation agencies and corporate translation departments. The system has been implemented by several hundred companies worldwide to boost performance and efficiency.

XTRF supports the work of translation departments, covering almost all areas of activity, including translation project and work-flow management, customer and subcontractor database management, invoicing management, support of sales activities, preparation of quotes, project file management and quality management. The system can also expand to include an on-line partner portal for customers and suppliers.

XTRF delivers immediate time and cost-savings by automating project management tasks. What is more, XTRF meets your communication challenges head on with built-in and feature-rich client portals. XTRF can exercise precise control over project budgets and offers impressive intelligent systems.

The Four Stages of Translation Agency Growth

by Jurek Nedoma

Freedom

I took a long time to make this decision. I analysed all the pros and cons many times. Then finally:

– *Honey! I've decided to devote all my time to translation!* – I declared with relief.

– *Are you planning on quitting your current job, after so many years in that company?* – asked my wife, a bit surprised.

– *Exactly! I don't want to hear the never-ending stupid comments from the head of my department any longer! I don't want to have to follow all the – often conflicting – orders issued by our boss…* – I continued the explosion of long-restrained dissatisfaction.

– *But…* – my wife tried to calm me down.

– *No buts, darling! I'm tired of the rat race. I don't feel like listening to a stupid boss. From now on I will be my own boss!*

– *This way, for the first time, you'll be able to work with a boss as smart as yourself. Congratulations!* – she said, laughing.

– *Don't make fun of me, please!* – I protested, but in reality I liked the prospect.

– Let's be serious. In fact, our salaries, although relatively high, need supplementing with additional work. You spend so many evenings working as a freelance translator… – my wife tried to find common ground, sensingmy determination.

– Well, at the moment, I work on translations two hours a day on average.

– Really you should say "two hours an evening, not 'a day', – cclarified my wife, a little sourly. – And don't forget all those weekends you've spent at the computer.*

Indeed, we both criticised my evening occupation repeatedly. Our social life suffered, we didn't have enough time to meet our friends, and rarely had time for our favourite hobby, hiking, on sunny weekends.

– Increasing the volume of work won't be difficult, because I already receive regular jobs from several clients and they've already asked about the possibility of increasing the workload. – I said with conviction.*

– And will you rent a room for your mini translation agency? – she asked.*

– No, of course not! Here is my plan: I will work as an independent freelancer based at home. My home is my office, I'll use the desk in our spare room.

– A new meaning for "My home is my castle". What a novelty! – she said jokingly, but she accepted my plan.*

– And think about additional savings: now I drive 12 km every morning to the office, dealing with traffic jams during rush hour. On the way home, another 12 km and even worse traffic jams. I lose so much time and the car consumes a lot of fuel…

Full of optimism, I handed in my notice and a few weeks later, I really was free. I could manage my professional life much more conveniently than before:

1. I didn't need to wake up to the sound of the alarm clock

2. I didn't have to hurry to shave anymore

3. I could easily eat my breakfast without hurrying

4. I stopped commuting

5. My car mileage reduced by 500-600 km monthly

6. I could also prepare something special for dinner for us both

All these manifestations of my freedom were brilliant. And best of all, I had enough time to meet all the deadlines even with the slowly growing number of jobs. I was more than happy.

Delighted with my newly discovered freedom, I didn't see any disadvantages to this way of working.

The first comment about the change in my daily schedule came from an unexpected source. A neighbour met me in the elevator and asked with concern:

– Is something wrong?

– Why? – I was totally surprised.

– In the past, I saw you every morning, leaving for work in your car. And now? Your car doesn't budge from the parking lot. Don't you have money for petrol?

STAGE TWO
Overload

At first, my primary concern was increasing the number of clients and the total volume of jobs. Previously, my "business hours" as a freelancer were limited to 2-3 hours per evening plus time devoted to translation at the weekends. Preparing myself for the new model of work, I had informed my clients in advance about my ability to accept more projects.

During the relatively short transition period I was still paid by my previous employer. As I was officially on annual leave from my previous employment, I was still covered by social security.

I was lucky because a few large projects arrived at that point and my workload doubled almost immediately and continued growing.

I didn't work in the evenings and consequently I definitely had a fresher mind. In these favourable conditions I was reaching the expected quality of my translations faster and easier than before.

At the end of my busy "annual leave" I officially registered my own business and started to pay social security contributions myself.

Now I could enjoy having free evenings and weekends and I was much more relaxed. I rediscovered the joy of exercising at the gym and swimming at the pool. Our social life also became much more varied – gatherings with friends, concerts, trips to the theatre and cinema, and our beloved mountain hikes on sunny Saturdays.

Word of mouth marketing proved to be a very effective way to acquire new customers.

My work, more efficient than before, gave me a lot of satisfaction and my hourly rate as a translator rose significantly, because faster translating means higher output.

Working around 6-7 hours a day, I was paid more than previously, even with 8 hours at my day job and 2-3 hours at the computer in the evenings. On top of all that, I saved so much time, previously spent commuting, and I had an added bonus – free weekends.

A few months after quitting permanent employment, the number of projects increased so significantly that my working time reached 8 hours a day on average.

Now my monthly income was much higher than before and I smiled, remembering the comment of my worried neighbour:

> *– Is something wrong? Your car doesn't budge from the parking lot.*
> *Don't you have money for petrol?*

I also learned that working as a freelancer means you need to adapt to a changing workload.

Regular collaboration with several customers means inevitable fluctuations in workload. Working "on average" 8 hours a day means that one day could be 6 hours, and another day could be 10 hours.

I did my own statistical analyses and saw that the majority of translation orders are placed on Wednesdays and Thursdays. And most deadlines are defined as "EOB" (end of business).

But how to deal with an accumulation of projects? In my experience, the most efficient method was convincing the customer to accept shifting the deadline to "first thing next morning" instead of "EOB".

For example, as a rule, customers waiting for a translation "Tuesday EOB" easily accept the deadline "Wednesday before business hours". For the customer this delay is almost imperceptible and the translator gains additional 15 hours in the evening or night to complete the job. And in the case of "Friday EOB", the customer's acceptance of "Monday before business hours" means 2.5 extra days for the translator.

Of course, this solution, although easily accepted by clients, means negating the beloved model of free evenings and weekends for translators.

That is why translators often choose another solution – they share the work with colleagues. And this represents the end of the second stage of company growth.

For me, sharing projects with another translator meant a change of responsibility for the quality of the translation. When I first subcontracted a translation project to a friend of mine, known as a good translator, I placed myself in the position of revisor and proofreader.

micro-SLV*

The first subcontracted project was an ad hoc decision when several project deadlines coincided. The assigned translator was my first choice, my best choice and my only available choice.

I was aware that I was fully responsible for ensuring the quality of the work. Therefore, I reserved sufficient time to thoroughly verify the text provided by my colleague.

Of course, I earned less on this project, because I had to share the fee with my friend. But along the way I learned a few translation industry norms:

- verification took me about 30-40% of the time that I would have spent translating the text myself,

- two people should work together on a project in order to ensure the quality of the translation (translator and reviewer),

- the reviewer should be more experienced than the translator,

- the first rule of the reviewer's work is similar to the Hippocratic Oath – primum non nocere (first do no harm), i.e. leave everything that has been translated correctly as is.

* Single Language Vendor

In addition, I noticed that not all translators can correctly format the target text so that it is graphically similar to the source text. Customers often pay attention to the layout of the target text, because it can be assessed even without knowing the language.

This is why it is worth spending some time improving the formatting of the target text. This last element is probably less relevant for translators using CAT tools. Currently, the clean version of the translation automatically restores formatting compatible with the original.

Anyway, this "emergency assignment" with a colleague was a milestone in my business.

It confirmed the desirability of transferring more and more projects to good translators. And for me, it meant a gradual elimination of my role as translator. I had been devoting more and more time to the proofreading and editing tasks, as well as building a team of translators whose professional skills could ensure the expected level of translation quality was maintained.

I spent a lot of time evaluating sample translations and negotiating subcontractor's agreements. In this way, almost imperceptibly, I started acting as a micro SLV company. In fact, the company's structure started to emerge, with the first departments outlined: Human Resources, Project Management, Quality Assurance.

I had a group of proven translators, but all texts were proofread and edited by me. The offered rates were higher than earlier (when I worked alone) but the customers appreciated the fact that two people were always assigned to each project.

But before delivery of the translation to the customer, I was proofreading, editing and formatting each file myself. The turnover of my micro SLV was limited by my work efficiency and was at least three times higher than my performance as a freelancer.

Unfortunately, this work model is not scalable. For this reason, the moment of the next stage was approaching.

Regular Translation Agency

After several years acting as a mini-SLV based at home, my alter ego started noticing the inconveniences of choosing this way of working.

The aspects I previously considered as major advantages had lost some of their shine. I realised that:

- living in isolation from the world caused me certain psychological problems,

- living and working in the limited space of my home, resulted in difficulty separating my private life from my working life,

- communicating with customers and co-workers only by phone or email is neither conducive to building good professional relationships, nor an atmosphere of mutual trust,

- administrative work consumed a growing proportion of my time and I had to accept working much more than 8 hours a day.

For these reasons, it was necessary to think about changing the current mode of activity.

The first step was to hire a full-time assistant. Of course, the limited space meant adding another desk to the flat was not an option – so it was necessary to move my agency to an office building.

My talented assistant quickly learned the specifics of working in the translation industry. She started with the simplest administrative and office tasks, but soon began to help me coordinate the work of subcontractors and build good working relationships with my customers.

I had also a brilliant helper, in the shape of my son. Coming to the end of his studies in marketing and management, he already had extensive experience in the field of translation, having grown up in the centre of my translation office.

It so happened that my son, in addition to his specialised studies, was fluent in three important foreign languages – English, French and Italian. Adding to this my decent knowledge of English, German, Russian and Czech, and passive knowledge of several other Slavic languages, we could successfully supervise translations in many language combinations.

I will always remember the serious conversation my son initiated at the end of his studies. He stated that the translation agency I had set up (together with my wife) ensured a good standard of living for one family. But if I let him get involved in the development of the agency, he could help double the turnover and profits - and it would be a great professional start for him.

This was a big step forward in generic growth of the company. We gradually increased our staff. The former assistant became the first project manager. Relatively quickly the entire Project Management Department appeared – a total of 3 PMs.

Together with my son, we began to appear at industry conferences abroad. This was a good investment: we built good relationships with many customers and we met many interesting people.

For us these events were very informative, and we really appreciated the open atmosphere of these meetings. It turns out that we had all had similar experiences and were struggling with similar challenges. Thanks to our honest exchange of views, we were able to make fewer mistakes as we developed our office.

The company started to grow more quickly. Gradually we created new departments in our company structure:

- Sales (with marketing),

- Operations (Project Managers and Quality Assurance team),

- Finance,

- Technology.

The head of each department became a member of the company's senior management team (called S-O-F-T).

Nevertheless, our company's journey has been anything but smooth and soft. However, reflecting on my 25 years in this industry, I can confirm that creating a translation agency has brought me a lot of satisfaction.

Jurek Nedoma has worked in the language industry for over 25 years. He is the founder and former manager of LIDOLANG Specialist Translations, which in 2015 was ranked the 16th translation company in the CEE Region (CSA Report 2015).

In the 2013-2015 period, Jurek was Treasurer of the European Language Industry Association (ELIA).

Jurek Nedoma is also co-founder of the professional TMS software development firm XTRF Management System.

How XTRF has helped our clients grow

tarjama
WORDSMITHS

Tarjama is a global Language Service Provider with an operations team of in-house translators, copywriters, editors, reviewers, and project managers.

From a small local company to a global one

Starting out in 2008 as a translation company based in the UAE, in recent years Tarjama we've rapidly expanded, and we now enjoy a global presence. But with offices, vendors, and clients spread around the world, **we needed to identify and implement a system that would streamline our complex translation workflows, optimize our productivity, and give management full visibility**.

Our workflow involves numerous stakeholders including project managers, linguists, our finance team, and our clients. Having a manual process that solely relied on emails, attachments, and Excel sheets had become increasingly complicated and time-consuming. So much time was being spent on repetitive tasks and communication.

What having one central system means for us

With XTRF, we found one central system that we can fully rely on for our whole translation management process. **XTRF provides us with a single environment where we can connect and work with all stakeholders throughout our end-to-end translation workflow** - from processing client quotations to assigning tasks to linguists and delivering the final project.

XTRF made it a whole lot easier for our finance team as well. They can now set up, process, and issue quotations and invoices directly through XTRF, for the client's visibility and approval. We faced one issue where some of our clients needed their invoices in Arabic. But XTRF's support team solved that problem for us. They were quick to adapt our system features so we can download an Arabic version of the invoice. Instead of going through the hassle of downloading the English version ourselves, translating it, and sending the translated version to our client via email, we can now do it with a click of a button.

Our project managers have full visibility and control over our human resources and client projects. **XTRF imports and centralizes details of our human resources, making it so much easier and faster to find the right talent for each request.** XTRF also gives us a transparent view of all projects, including the revenue, costs, and profit margin of each project, which enables us to make key data-driven decisions.

We can satisfy increasingly complicated client demands

Another great advantage of XTRF is the client portal, where our clients can directly make requests and access their project status and invoices. When one of our potential clients requested some adjustments to the client portal before closing a deal with us, XTRF's support team was quick to help. They were able to get the customizations set up in a short time before the client's agreed starting date with us.

Using XTRF has simplified our complex daily workflows, saving us so much time and enabling us to work smarter. Ultimately, this means we can deliver better translations, faster, for our valued clients.

Tarjama Team

Loqipa

We started as a tiny language service provider in Brno, Czech Republic. As we were slowly growing, we understood we needed a tool that would help us not only coordinate our work, but also store all our information, data, and define our processes. A tool that would be able to pull out useful statistics with only a few clicks of the mouse.

We did our research, looking for a useful TMS that would meet all our needs, but as you know, it's no easy task. So, we approached things from a different angle; we checked what our vendors were using since we knew we shared similar management needs and mindsets.

We picked three candidates to test, and XTRF was, fortunately, one of them. From the very beginning, we knew XTRF would be a winner. Why? For one reason and one reason only: **XTRF was built by people who'd worked in the translation and localization industry for years. They'd gotten to know every process there is, realizing all the small variations. They knew exactly how complicated and complex our industry can be.**

Every single company providing localization services has its own parameters to work by, all PMs are different, and everyone likes to manage their work in a slightly different way. But this is not only about the people working with the system on a daily basis—all of our clients also approach the localization of their product in a different way. **XTRF is built to satisfy this amazing variability of localization services.** Isn't that great? And what's even better is that they offer a huge range of customization. So if you happen to be missing a certain functionality, they're happy to talk about a solution, or they'll point you in the right direction, because the feature may well already be integrated.

We are still at the very beginning of using XTRF. But we already know that **using XTRF in your day-to-day workflow is like hiring a highly effective colleague**. They ask a lot of questions and want to know every little detail, they look in all the nooks and crannies. So, you find the time, teach them everything there is to know, give them all the data to play with. Then there comes a time when they finally have all the information and you ask them to do something for you. And they blow you away. Just wait and see.

Michaela Fioleková, Head of Production, Loqipa

ATL.

At ATL, our everyday work is totally focused on our customers' needs, but we have our own requirements as to how the processes and workflows should run and what tools make that possible. This also means making the right choices.

Here's a brief story of one such choice we've made back in 2008.

Soon after the first meeting regarding XTRF's full integration with memoQ in 2016, we successfully implemented it, together with other key features like Smart Projects.

We had already used both XTRF and memoQ, but after switching to Smart Projects and using memoQ Project Templates, we noticed a significant rise in productivity.

For a company like ATL, where productivity is one of the keys to success, this was an important step forward. We could clearly see the numbers behind the change.

Thanks to responsible implementation and dedicated technical support, over 50% of the manual, recurrent tasks were taken off the PMs' to-do lists.

This has enabled the production team to focus on monitoring the process and has given us the ability to be more flexible in finding customized solutions for different clients' needs.

Projects are distributed and delivered faster, which reduces the time to market.

Project Managers do not need to prioritize time-consuming administrative tasks as these are being handled automatically in the background, and many of them simultaneously.

Project registration (in both tools at the same time), selecting the template, language pairs, analyzing files and showing the results directly in XTRF – these are just some basic options that are essential for any smooth workflow.

The 26th place in the CSA ranking among over 2,000 translation companies from Central and Eastern Europe is a result of the hard work of dedicated professionals who make a true team. It is also the outcome of making the right decisions at the right time, which improves our work and our customers' experience.

One such decision was the implementation of XTRF as well as its full integration with one of the leading CAT tools, namely memoQ.

 Joanna Tarasiewicz, Production Manager, ATL

XTRF — overview:
how we can help
grow your business

XTRF

Yet another cloud-based TMS solution claiming to work miracles.
We know what you're thinking, but just humor us a little.

XTRF is pretty cutting-edge when it comes to technological developments in the translation sector. Why? **It's designed and developed by people who know the industry inside out.**

And what's so special about that? Well, we've all been in your shoes. That means we know all too well how stressful and time-consuming configuring multilingual projects across various time zones can be. And that's our secret weapon.

Of course TMS solutions are no novelty these days, but we doubt you've come across anything quite like XTRF before. In fact, its advantages are so big and its disadvantages so small that simply brushing it aside seems pretty unthinkable.

For starters, the platform's integration with CAT tools enables seamless project creation. It's even capable of automatically selecting vendors based on previous translation ratings. That means you can rest assured your clients' projects are always in the best hands.

But XTRF's benefits by no means end there. **It's business reporting capabilities are also second to none. This unique feature provides management with the power to make data-driven decisions at the touch of a button.**

So if you're desperate to claw valuable time back for client acquisition and face-to-face business meetings (remember those!), then XTRF is a no-brainer.

But it's just for big name LSPs, we hear you say. Wrong again. **XTRF's scalable platform can be adapted to fit your specific needs, whether you're a small-scale SLV or a multinational corporation.**

In fact, the exclusive XTRF Academy has been designed specifically with smaller LSPs in mind. We know how tough those first few years in business can be. It's all about keeping costs down and projecting as professional an image as possible to your clients.

Enter XTRF's self-implementation program. We get it. Most TMS solutions are way beyond your budget and not everyone in the industry can afford regular implementation right now.

Does that mean you have to deprive yourself of the chance to take your business to the next level? Not anymore. **Our extensive series of training videos and scripts enable you to take full advantage of all the benefits of XTRF for a fraction of the cost.**

Let's be honest, it'll take a little longer to get things up and running this way. But if you've made it this far in the translation business then you're clearly no stranger to a little overtime. We like to look at it as a step towards mundane task freedom.

In simple terms, streamlining your processes and automating everyday tasks from such an early stage means your business will be far better prepared for growth. And if that wasn't enough, it's guaranteed to keep your employees smiling.

Not convinced XTRF meets your company's workflow requirements?
That may very well be true — but it's also easily resolved.

Say hello to our revered Customization Department. **XTRF's flexible interface means that whether you're after Hubspot integrations, or you're keen to meet complex client demands, we can make it happen.**

It's all this that's what makes us one of the fastest growing TMS in the industry. So why spend precious time poring over the pros and cons of our competitors when we can develop the exact solutions your business requires?

And if you thought our can-do attitude was limited customization, then you'd be wrong again. **Our solutions-oriented philosophy translates to ongoing product optimization and skills development.**

We take it upon ourselves to stay up-to-date with the latest news and developments in the translation and localization sector. This is made possible in part by the strength of our client relationships.

At XTRF, we see your decision to invest in us as an opportunity. By building lasting relationships with our client base we ensure we receive first hand accounts of emerging changes on the ground. It's a win-win.

But what does all this mean for you? Well, your software essentially has no sell-by date. In other words, it's an ever-evolving tool. And in this day and age that's priceless!

Let's talk!

sales@xtrf.eu