Communicate! one year down the road

This is the 9th issue of Communicate! since we launched one year ago. It seems like a good time for us at AIIC to look back at what we have achieved, consider what to do next and ask what you think.

Vincent BUCK.
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The launch of the webzine sought to address four main problems that we had identified with the previous version of the AIIC website. (If you want to take a peek, it is still partly available here.) These were, in no particular order of importance:

- Low content turnover
- Monolingualism
- Lack of visibility for AIIC interpreters and Regions
- Self-centredness

The webzine obviously sought to address the low content turnover. Our issues focusing on a particular theme seek to highlight professional contexts, address particular topics.

We have been promoting the idea that authors should be writing in their native languages and provide one or more translations of their submissions. It would indeed be paradoxical for this website to reinforce the English-only trend and we expect to be able to deliver more multilingual content in the future.

We are actively encouraging all AIIC interpreters and Regions to contribute to the content of the webzine. We are one profession but our markets and working environments differ. Language requirements go from one extreme to the other. If one A and many Cs is your passport to regular jobs in Brussels or Geneva, bi-active combinations will land you more assignments in many countries. That's why we need still more input from our members and partners, wherever they are, to ensure that this publication reflects the true nature of the profession, and is useful to colleagues, would-be colleagues, clients and other language or conference professionals alike.

The webzine is also about showing AIIC as it really is: an association that seeks to represent the profession in its entirety and promote its interests. This online publication stresses professional themes and issues, and not the structures and association rules that operate in the background to serve those goals. This theme-centric approach filters through into Communicate!'s design, with articles automatically cross-referenced by broad themes. You will find a current selection of them on the right-hand side of every article, in the 'Related' box.

Readership

Our user base has continued to grow steadily, with up to 4,500 different people visiting the AIIC website at least once monthly recently. We are now cruising at some 60,000 pages viewed per
month on the www.aiic.net domain, up from 25,000 before we launched our webzine.

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We think the user and page impression figures are very positive given the size of our potential audience. No one knows exactly how many professional conference interpreters there are in the world, but it is safe to assume that there are probably not more than 5 or 6 thousand, of whom 2500 are members of AIIC.

But not all our readers are interpreters, far from it. Our hit list suggests that a fair number of you are actually students in interpreting schools. So far we do not know much about our other readers, who they are, where they come from, what they are looking for on this website, and especially whether they've found it.

Item number one on our New Year resolutions list involves filling that gap. There will be a Communicate! readers' survey and we hope that you will take a few moments to answer some questions. It will help us improve our content and services.

**Interactivity & Customisation**

Many find the Internet a great invention because you can tell the world what you know and think. We find the Internet especially interesting because it lets you tell us what you know and think.

From the very beginning, this website was designed with user interaction in mind. Courtesy of the Internet we can bring together people separated in space and time.

We are convinced in AIIC that the profession - i.e. professional conference interpreters both members and non-members of AIIC - needs a venue to come together, discuss, and think about its future. There are questions galore. What is or will be the impact of ICT, of globalisation, of emerging markets on conference interpretation? What does a European Union with twenty or more official languages mean for the profession? We hope that this website can be a forum where all parties concerned will exchange their views and formulate solutions.

This is why this website has a number of tools to help you interact and contribute. You will find them in the 'Toolbox', on the left-hand side of every article. There are tools for e-mailing stories, printing, saving, rating, commenting or linking from them. Let's review some of them.
Readers' Comments

We'll be frank. We were a tad disappointed at the level of input we received from you in the last year. We simply expected more user comments. Perhaps we need to run other and better stories to get you to react. That's one item on our resolutions list for the New Year. We will also attempt to keep any promising discussion thread alive. So, as far as possible, we will from now on post answers to questions online for everyone to see and react to. So far, we had tended to take up questions on a one-to-one basis with their authors.

To facilitate the interaction, the in-page comment facility has been enhanced. For instance, it is now possible to qualify your postings. Icons will then help other readers to better situate your contribution in the discussion, whether you agree, disagree, have a question or can offer a reply. You can also respond directly to previous messages. A threaded hierarchy will then help you visualise who's replying to whom. And finally, as it would be a pity to discourage long and well-argued contributions, we have removed the 3000-character size limitation that used to exist for comments.

Readers' Ratings
Apart from general comments from visitors we also received, most by direct e-mail, an occasional remark or criticism about the style or the slant of some the articles. Such contributions are always welcome. They serve as a useful guide to authors and editors alike. Don't forget that this is the Internet and that we have precious little idea who exactly we are writing for and what their particular information needs are. So, from now on, we would like to encourage you to rate more systematically our website's content. To that effect, a new 'Rate this page' link had been added to the Toolbox.

Your rants and raves will be kept private and only made available to the article's author and to the webeditors' team.

Reading Basket

You know the feeling. You've come to a website and a couple of articles look interesting enough but you don't have the time to read them right now, and you browser's list of favourites is too crammed and unwieldy for yet more. Or you would like to keep pages that are updated regularly close at hand - AIIC-brokered agreement rates for instance. Well, all that is now possible on our website. You can keep your reading basket of articles - whether they are published as part of Communicate! or the remainder of the website. All you need to do is click the Save this for later' link in the article's 'Toolbox'.

Each time you save a new page, a window will pop up with your updated bookmarks. If you find that annoying, you can choose not to display it automatically after saving a page. Of course, you can delete the articles that do not interest you any longer.
You can retrieve your bookmarks at your leisure, during the same visit or any time later, by opening any article. You will see a new box appear in the top right corner of the page under the title: MY.AIIC.NET, with an indication of how many articles you have saved and a link to display them.

To make use of this feature on the website, you need to have Javascript and cookies enabled in your browser (this is the default setting on nearly all browsers, so don't worry). You should also be aware that the system will remember about your bookmarks only if you come back to the website from the same computer and with the same browser (and, of course, if you have not deleted your cookies in the meantime).

**Links**

The Internet is ...a net. Websites aren't books and readers will come and go from one site to the next. Actually, we would like to encourage you to share links of interest with all other users. Simply click the 'Add a related link' link. It then becomes available for other readers under the same article, and all articles that share the same theme for that matter. We will soon make the collection of links searchable and easier to navigate. Another item on our New Year resolutions list.

**Services**

**Newsletters**

We also keep you informed by e-mail. Over 2300 people have already subscribed to our general newsletter that goes out about every month, with news stories and the contents of the month's Communicate! Special mailing lists are also available for professional interpreters who work for the major international organisations with whom AIIC has brokered collective agreements. Those lists are used on request, mainly by the sector's professional and negotiating delegations.

**Online Database**

Amongst the services we offer, our members' database is the most sought-after. Month in, month out, our online database scores over a third of all hits on the domain. As it is only natural that we should be giving publicity to our members, we have recently made some technical changes, which means our membership information is also indexed on the wider Internet. On the major search engines, such a Google, typing a member's first and last name, with 'AIIC” as a further selection keyword as the case may be, will retrieve the corresponding database record.

Our online database is updated very regularly from our Geneva headquarters, so you can be sure to always have the latest telephone number and e-mail address.

In the near future, we will be considering adding new and exciting services to the public section of this website, allowing users to easily select AIIC interpreters on the basis of passive and active languages, and geographical distribution criteria.

**Privacy & Cookies**

AIIC takes your online privacy very seriously. As we have just added new functions to our public website that require cookies, we would like to draw your attention to this site's privacy policy:

Like many web sites, we collect non-personally identifiable information about site visits in order to:

- analyse traffic and reading patterns,
- customise our pages for individual users.
Log Files

All websites keep log files containing basic information like what time what pages were viewed, the type of operating system and browser you are using, and the IP address of your computer. If you connect to the Internet through an ISP, a random IP address is attributed to you dynamically at each log-in. It may even change during your Internet session. At any rate we cannot and do not make any effort to correlate IP addresses and individual users. We simply use our log files to analyse reading and navigation patterns and improve the in-house software that run the site accordingly.

Also, we do not gather broad demographic information for aggregate use nor do we share log file information with advertisers or anyone else.

Cookies

At AIIC.NET we only use cookies to allow you to customise certain aspects of the site.

A "cookie" is a small piece of information in the form of a tiny text file sent to you by a web server so it can later be read back. A cookie is always linked to a particular computer and a particular browser.

This is useful for having the browser 'remember' some specific information that is required to display customised pages. For instance, we can only retrieve the pages that you have saved for later if we have a way to mark out who has saved what page so that we can display it next time they visit the site. Cookies make that very easy to implement.

But the important thing is that we do not run banner ads nor share cookie information with anyone else. (If you are generally uncomfortable with advertising cookies, you will be interested to know that disabling cookies altogether in your browser is not the only way to escape from the clutches of the big ad networks: DoubleClick - the ubiquitous company that cross-references advertising cookies from many sites to create and then sell customer profiles - lets you 'turn-off' their cookies. Go to www.adchoices.com/optout.htm for opting out of DoubleClick cookies, and www.arsdigita.com/books/panda/user-tracking for more information about user tracking)

The future

So much for this webzine, its interactive tools and online services. Of course, in and of themselves, all this is not enough to make our dream come true and create what Internet pundits call a 'virtual or online community' around conference interpretation. The real catalysts and bridge-builders are people. To make it happen, we need more of them, inside or outside AIIC. The door is open.

Recommended citation format: