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21.02

TALENT SOURCING? NOT A PROBLEM

An independent industry registry for localization talent is helping to meet the demands of a strained industry

ABSTRACT: As media localization continues to flourish in line with the growth in the entertainment sector, the words 'talent crunch' echo in industry forums. The POOOL is a market-wide initiative offering a solution to this issue.

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As streaming platforms take over the world and the volume of entertainment content continues to increase, talks of the so-called talent crunch echo in industry forums. They most frequently relate to specific roles in the media localization industry, such as voiceover actors and dubbing directors, or subtitlers in new language combinations.

This talent shortage has been a theme at recent industry events that focus on content localization, such as MESA's Content Workflow Management Forum (CWMF) and the Languages & the Media 2021 conference. As new streaming launches are announced, industry experts predict that the situation will worsen in coming months, and even the traditionally better-resourced pool

THE ABILITY TO QUICKLY FIND NEW TALENT who possess the linguistic and technical skills required to competently perform tasks commonly required in today's subtitling workflows has become more important than ever before.

of subtitling talent will become strained.

Early in 2020, content owners and distributors said they saw few delays in their work, other than issues related to worldwide lockdowns. Since then, the situation seems to have taken a turn for the worse, with a combined talent crunch and rising translation demands.

Large media localization providers have gone from working in 60-plus languages a few years ago to 100-plus, and non-English content is growing at an incredible pace. Mark Howarth, president of Iyuno-SDI, the largest media localization provider in the market, shared how his company has seen unprecedented attrition, both with freelance workers as well as in-house staff, a sign of an industry trend that plagues not only language service providers (LSPs) but content owners as well. He predicted "an insane amount of demand" for localization in the next 24 months.

"Massive, multiple streaming launches are expected to continue one after the other, fighting over the same demographic," he said. "Unfortunately, they are not coordinated or scheduled in a manner to optimize the supply and demand on resources, and so it puts a huge strain on the supply chain." This is bound to result in significant problems with sourcing media-trained talent at all lines of production.

How we handle this capacity constraint going forward will be one of the biggest challenges we will have to face as an industry.

Fortunately, a number of training initiatives have already been launched by individual LSPs. Netflix has taken this to another level, by funding a course on translation and adaptation for dubbing in collaboration with the Centre for Translation Studies at University College London, which made its debut in Latin America

recently and has plans to expand in Europe. In October, a group of well-known academics at the University of Warsaw also launched an online audiovisual translation (AVT) masterclass, aiming to offer continuous training to professionals in the subtitling market, with specialized courses to suit different skill levels, so as to enable speedy training and upskilling of professionals. They have invited other academics that specialize in AVT to join them, with the aim of broadening the offering in a number of languages.

RECRUITMENT ISSUES

While the training of new resources is tackled from many angles, in order to expand the pool of available resources to cater for the market demand, this does not fully address the recruitment issue that LSPs face.

The POOOL — an initiative spearheaded by OOONA, one of the leading software developers in the media market — has been launched to close this gap and enable quick searchability of resources by creating an independent industry registry for professionals working in all areas of media localization. Freelance talent can self-register, detailing their skills and expertise, so they can more easily be connected to the 100-plus LSPs that have already become members during the beta release of the platform.

The POOOL is governed by a steering committee and an advisory board consisting of acclaimed academics in the field of audiovisual localization, as well as representatives of LSPs, translator associations and industry bodies such as MESA. They collaborate on the design of the platform to ensure its acceptance and usability both by individuals wishing to raise their visibility in the sector

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and widen their network, as well as by LSPs in search of talent. More than 600 translators that specialize in media localization from 65 countries have already joined the platform to date, and thousands of searches are completed by member LSPs on a monthly basis.

The value of The POOOL, however, does not lie solely on the fact that it is a directory developed with the support and input of a wide range of academic and industry stakeholders, but in its plans to complement its offering with a certification program in audio-visual translation. The latter is currently in development under the leadership of Prof. Jorge Díaz-Cintas, director of the Centre for Translation Studies at UCL and co-author of the seminal book "Sub-titling: Concepts and Practices," which is used as the core textbook for subtitling training in universities and colleges all over the world. The certification aims to become an industry standard of excellence for a variety of tasks subtitlers are normally asked to perform in their professional capacity, such as subtitle translation, captioning and spotting, and one can easily imagine post-editing as well in the future. Its goal is to recognize high professional standards in each of these areas and acknowledge professionals that have attained them.

Audiovisual translation is a sector where talent comes in all shapes and forms, making it hard for LSPs to assess the experience of freelance resources and the quality they are able to produce without putting them through time-consuming and costly in-house testing procedures. A simple job ad for subtitling professionals can result in a high volume of applications from a wide mixture of applicants: expert subtitlers with high technical experience and the ability to work in a variety of professional software and to different subtitling and captioning specs; experienced translators that possess high linguistic knowledge but basic technical skills; holders of certificates from a variety of subtitling courses mushrooming world-wide whose value may be hard to compare; self-taught amateurs and all shades in between.

THE SOLUTION

In a booming industry sector, with reported talent shortage issues as a result of its accelerated growth rate and the unpredictability of peaks in volume that major streaming launches typically result in, it is important to be able to quickly find new talent that possesses the
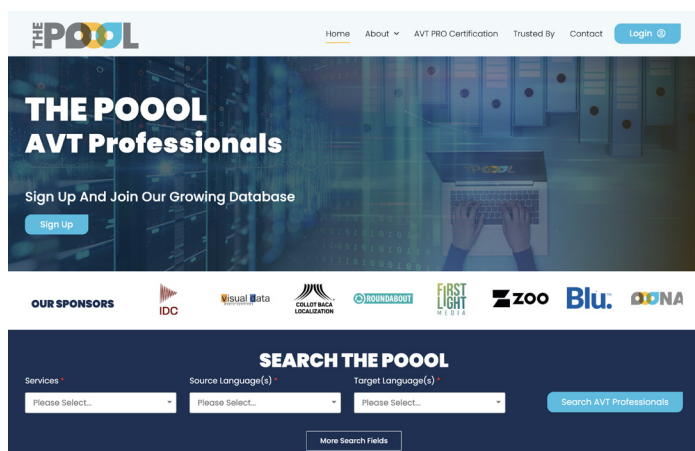

OOONA's The Poool is the go-to directory for localization talent.

linguistic and technical skills required to competently perform tasks that are common in today's subtitling workflows. The short dead-lines under which LSPs are often required to onboard new subtitlers in certain language combinations to cater for increased translation needs during streaming launches makes it hard, even for the largest among them, to satisfy client demand and speed to market. The AVT Pro certification program promises to solve this issue and offer a stamp of approval backed by both the industry and the academia, which will enable the speedy identification and recruitment of resources. "Having access to trusted, pre-qualified resources is an invaluable asset in today's fast-paced mediascape," said Helen Larson, VP of localization at ZOO Digital.

The POOOL promises to be a great resource for LSPs of all sizes, while at the same time giving language professionals access to a wide variety of clients, especially as subtitling and captioning become a core task in other localization verticals as well. Its transparent nature coupled with the AVT Pro certification will enable translators to have their skills recognized among their peers, so they may demand appropriate remuneration for the expertise they offer." ⊞

A powerful cloud API to convert between different subtitle and caption formats
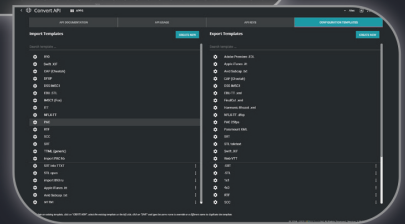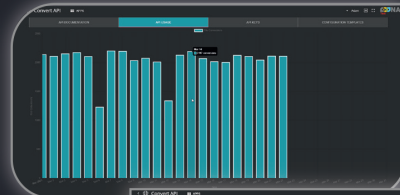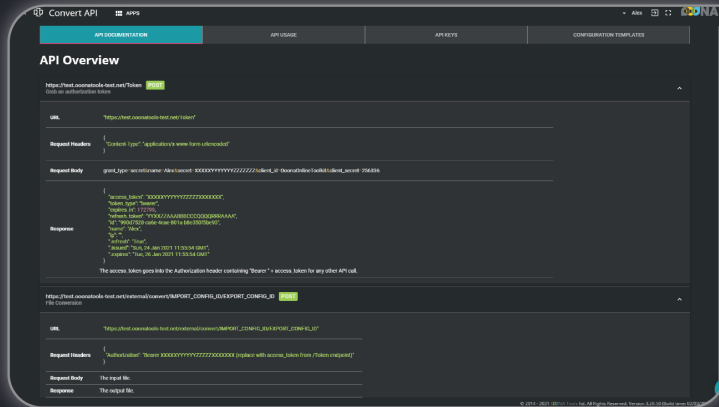
- Flexible subscription terms
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- Frame rate conversion
- Custom presets
- Seamless integration into your workflows
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For more information https://ooona.net