



From the President

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Our Strengths: Conference, Size, Headquarters

In the last issue we

reviewed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) identified by the Board during the January Planning Day. However, identification of these individual components is not the sole purpose of the SWOT analysis; rather, it is an important step toward the goal of identifying strategic options. Strengths, which are internal to the organization, should be used to maximize the opportunities and minimize threats in the external environment. Conversely, weaknesses, which are also internal to the organization, should be reduced or eliminated.

Let us now take a closer look at our Association's strengths. During a brainstorming session the Board first came up with a list, and then each Board member selected the three strengths that he or she deemed to be the most important. Here is the full list with the number of votes for each strength in parentheses: ATA Annual Conference (8); size (6); Headquarters stability (6); collegiality among members (5); promoting the profession (4); certification (4); financial stability (3); *The ATA Chronicle* (2); and name recognition (2). Each of the following received one vote: unique authoritative voice; website; inclusiveness; retention rate; diversity; continuity/incremental renewal; divisions; chapters; volunteers; ability to grow; and public relations.

It is no surprise that ATA's Annual Conference came up at the top. In the past 10 years, each of our annual gatherings has attracted between 1,200 and 2,000 attendees from dozens of countries, making it the largest event in the translation and interpreting industry worldwide. The four-day event showcases panel discussions, expert presentations, training workshops, and scholarly papers. It also features a job

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marketplace, a vendor exhibit hall, certification testing, and networking sessions designed to build professional contacts for attendees. If you have not yet attended our Annual Conference, you have missed out on a lot of opportunities to develop your skills further and to network with your peers.

The Association's size is also unique. We finished 2008 with 10,644 members, making ATA the largest association in the translation and interpreting industry. Even in China, which has an estimated 60,000 professional translators and interpreters with officially conferred credentials, the number of members in the country's only national organization, the Translators Association of China, is just over 2,000. Size, however, was also identified as one of our weaknesses—as you know from physics, the greater the mass the more difficult it is to change direction, and we need to remain nimble to succeed.

ATA Headquarters is not as visible, but nonetheless is an extremely important strength. Most of our sister organizations rely on volunteers, part-time employees, or association management firms to conduct their daily business.

While ATA also relies on volunteers to set the strategic direction and policies and to perform fiduciary and governance duties, we are fortunate to be able to employ a very efficient and dedicated staff at our Alexandria, Virginia, office to implement the strategic direction and policies set by the elected volunteer officials, and to provide support to all the Association's members. Many of us take it for granted that our Association runs like a well-oiled machine. It would come to a screeching halt if it were not for our Headquarters.

Now that we know what our strengths are, we need to figure out how to use them to our advantage. For example, our size enables us to exert legislative influence, an opportunity that was also identified by the Board during the Planning Day. We will revisit our options for leveraging our strengths to maximize opportunities and reduce or eliminate threats after we review each component of the SWOT analysis in detail. In the next issue, we will look at our weaknesses.

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