



From the President

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Our Challenges: Global Outsourcing and Crowdsourcing

After reviewing the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of our Association, we will now look at the challenges we face. The Board identified the following threats, with the number in parentheses indicating the value assigned to each (the higher the number, the more serious the threat): global outsourcing (7); crowdsourcing (7); economic downturn (6); certification by other entities (5); machine translation (4); increased competition for revenue streams (4); international expansion (3); licensure (3); legislation (1); new administration (1); and brand theft (1). Like opportunities, threats are external attributes which are typically beyond our control. We can, however, make an effort to reduce or eliminate our exposure to threats and, on occasion, turn them into opportunities.

Global outsourcing and crowdsourcing—two related forms of outsourcing—were assigned the greatest values. Outsourcing itself has been a basic business model in our industry for decades, particularly for languages of limited diffusion (for example, companies typically do not have full-time Faroese translators). In translation, global outsourcing is a relatively recent phenomenon. As in other industries, it exploits the inequality in the cost of labor in different parts of the world. Therefore, global outsourcing is a threat to those who live and work in the U.S. and other prosperous countries. To others, it is an opportunity. This is not the case with crowdsourcing, for which the cost of labor is irrelevant because the work is typically done for free.

What exactly is crowdsourcing? The term was coined in 2006 by Jeff Howe, the author of *Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd Is Driving the Future of Business*. The book is a worthwhile read. Wikipedia describes crowdsourcing as an “act of

taking a task traditionally performed by an employee or contractor, and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people or community in the form of an open call.” It is not without interest that Wikipedia itself is a product of crowdsourcing.

neers in developing countries. They find it rewarding in many ways without getting paid. At the same time, Kiva recognizes that the translation of legal documentation is not to be done by a crowd of volunteers, and the company hires professional translation service

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Examples of successful crowdsourcing efforts include open-source programming and data analysis. For example, Procter & Gamble uses crowdsourcing for research; Threadless.com for t-shirt design; and iStock for stock photography. Closer to home, Facebook uses a crowd of volunteers, mostly amateur translators, to localize its social networking site in a number of languages, with mixed results. Kiva, a California-based micro-lender, figured out the secret of translation crowdsourcing: it attracts translators who are passionate about the cause (connecting people through lending for the sake of alleviating poverty). Some of these translators are professionals, others are not, but they all want to facilitate communication between lenders and the entrepre-

providers to take care of this aspect of their business.

Unlike the economic downturn or the new administration, global outsourcing, crowdsourcing, machine translation, competition for revenue streams, and other challenges identified by ATA’s Board are here to stay, and we need to ask ourselves a few questions. Are they really threats? If so, can we reduce or eliminate our exposure to them? Can we turn them into opportunities? What if we use crowdsourcing to figure out how to deal with them? With nearly 11,000 members, we are a formidable crowd, and collectively we just might find a solution or two.

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