President Update

Dear Members and WASLI Supporters,

We hope you enjoy this newsletter and its focus on interpreters and the use of social media. Our hope is that each country will begin a constructive dialogue among interpreters, Deaf and hearing, along with the Deaf community, about what is appropriate and not appropriate for interpreters to post on their individual Facebook and Twitter accounts. While the use of social media can be a huge boost to our ability to communicate widely, it can also pose problems when interpreters are sharing information about where they are working, which breaches confidentiality for the consumers we serve. While many of the posts may appear innocent, it takes little information to determine the “who, what, where and how” when reading a post. While our consumers are free to post what they choose to about their lives, this is an aspect that we as interpreters must be very careful about. So, start the conversations about the issue. Consider where social media fits into guidelines for professional conduct. Examine what other professions do with regard to social media and privacy. Engage Deaf people in talking about what bothers them about the use of social media. Learn from each other as we come to a common understanding of what is appropriate in the context of defining our work.

On another note, thank you again to interpreters around the world who are stepping into volunteer roles to support our work—we appreciate each and every one of you who have donated your time and talent. We are thrilled that Arkady Belozovsky from the US has stepped forward as our International Sign Translation Coordinator, and Michelle Chang of Peru has volunteered to coordinate the written translations that we offer. Our thanks to Ms. Kagari Misawa from Japan who has identified a group from her country that is also willing to offer translation services. Our next task is to orient the coordinators to the task, identify the key documents requiring written and IS versions, and for each coordinator to begin working with a small team of translators. Thank you as well to Jordi Ferre, from Spain, who has helped put together the past two newsletters. We have so appreciated his help in getting us started. We are now seeking someone who can commit to taking on this task for the 2016-2019 term. If you are interested in this role, please see the call in this issue.

One of the WASLI values is to work collaboratively, and to that end we thank StreetLeverage (SL) and Brandon Arthur for the opportunity to partner and bring some live streaming of the most recent SL conference to interpreters living in countries outside the US and Canada. We have had some very positive comments from interpreters that took advantage of the offer to learn, and we look forward to more of these collaborative ventures.

Each of our regional representatives is tasked with supporting regional conferences and we are pleased to see that our African countries are working hard to host a regional conference in late 2016 or early 2017. Our thanks to Tim Tinat and Natasha Maliko for their leadership in this area, and to our Fund Development chairs, Chris Grooms and Bibi Dalacey-Mould for their support.
The authors: Ignacio Hermo, Michelle Hof, Angela Keil and Luigi Luccarelli are all members of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) who have been active on social media, having helped set up and run the association’s Facebook, Twitter and Google+ accounts. A. Keil is currently President of AIIC and L. Luccarelli Editor-in-Chief of AIIC publications.

A few years ago the authors thought that general social media guidelines would prove helpful for interpreters. This article grew out of their online discussions and was originally published in The AIIC Blog in March 2013.

1Social media are technology-based communication channels between groups or individuals, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, Flickr, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Digg, Delicious, Foursquare, etc. But also more traditional platforms or channels like Wikipedia, e-mail, news groups or Internet fora can be regarded as social media.

2AIIC Code of professional ethics, II, Article 2, 1.

Social Media: Cautions and Benefits for Sign Language Interpreters

Brett Best

Social media offers many professional advantages for sign language interpreters, but it presents some challenges, too. The nature of social media means that information shared online leaves a digital trail and has the ability to very quickly reach large numbers of people around the globe. This means that a lapse in professional judgment could have greater consequences in an online environment than in a traditional face-to-face setting. People may also see the online behaviour of one interpreter as representative of the entire interpreting profession. For these reasons and many others, professionalism online is important to maintain the professional integrity of individual interpreters and the interpreting profession. At the same time, social media offers several professional benefits to interpreters, and knowing how to take advantage of these benefits is also an important part of online professionalism.
Professional Cautions
A recent study exploring perceptions of how sign language interpreters use the social networking platform of Facebook (Best 2015) asked interpreters what challenges this new media brings to the profession. Maintaining confidentiality was mentioned as the biggest threat to interpreter professionalism. This is because sign language interpreters work in a very small community—the Deaf community—and, if an interpreter posts anything about work or their location while working, people familiar with this community can easily connect the dots to figure out where an interpreter is working or with whom they are working. This type of deductive disclosure is often possible even if the interpreter thinks that they have not mentioned specific details. Furthermore, social media has the possibility of reaching more people than the interpreter posting the information may have intended, increasing the possibility that inferring details may reach a large audience.

Professional Benefits
Interpreters in the same study (Best 2015) felt that the professional advantages of this type of social media far outweighed the challenges it brought to the profession. Social media enables interpreters to network with colleagues in unprecedented ways. For example, many social networking sites and apps now enable quick professional discussions in private forums with other interpreters. Social media is also a convenient form of continuing professional development and helps interpreters keep up to date with new signs, literature, research, conferences and relevant events. Information gleaned from social media accounts can also prove valuable for assignment preparation.

Social media is changing how the world communicates, and the interpreting profession is no exception. The digital domain offers both challenges and opportunities for interpreter professionalism. In order to leverage the professional advantages of social media and avoid the pitfalls, interpreters and interpreter educators should collectively work to raise awareness of sign language interpreter professionalism online as we go forward into the digital age.

References:

On the author:
Brett Best is a fully qualified American Sign Language (ASL)/British Sign Language (BSL)/English interpreter. She holds a BA degree in Deaf Studies from Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., a PGDip in BSL-English Interpretation and Translation through Sign Language International (SLI), and an MSc in European Masters in Sign Language Interpreting (EUMASLI) from Heriot-Watt University in Scotland.