

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Head of Largest Professional Translators' Organization Blasts LinkedIn CEO for "Thoroughly Unprofessional Practices"**

### **Calls LinkedIn's Plea to its Members to Provide Free Translation Services to the For-Profit Organization "Disappointing and Highly Unprofessional"**

(Alexandria, VA) JUNE 30, 2009 --- The president of the American Translators Association (ATA), the largest organization for professional translators and interpreters in the U.S., today blasted the CEO of LinkedIn in a letter, calling its plea for free translation services from the site's own members, "misguided, troubling and clearly incompatible with the operation of a for-profit enterprise." He added, "It's astonishing that this site, whose very existence is predicated on fostering professionalism, would compromise its own professionalism by approaching its members, hat in hand, seeking donations for a for-profit entity."

The controversy came to light after a "survey" was circulated by LinkedIn to its members who identified themselves as translators. The survey turned out to be an attempt to find the lure that would identify translators willing to translate LinkedIn's materials for free.

"ATA's translator members are happy to provide free translation services to charities, non-profit organizations and other worthy causes," ATA President Jiri Stejskal noted, "and we in fact have pro-bono and charitable activities underway every year. But LinkedIn is a for-profit enterprise that to date has had a record of paying professional translators for their services. It now seems that LinkedIn is looking for ways to cut the translation costs by lowering their professional standards."

The practice of using volunteers to provide professional services, widely referred to as "crowdsourcing," has been used with some success by non-profit entities such as Wikipedia. LinkedIn cited Wikipedia as the crowdsourcing example it was following, perhaps unaware that in the early years Wikipedia contained errors, incorrect data, unsubstantiated sources and other problems associated with an all-volunteer work force. It is these same error-prone results that social networking sites such as Facebook have encountered recently. Even Google, which also experiments with crowdsourcing, is

careful to employ professionals to translate Google's own marketing, branding, legal and advertising materials.

"LinkedIn is entering hazardous waters by attempting to use volunteers to perform professional services whose results will have a direct impact on the branding, image and professionalism of a company that claims to be the premier professional networking site on the Web," Stejskal noted. "Companies take a huge risk relying on unproven – and often untrained – volunteers who hold the company's very image in their inexperienced hands. These efforts often end in disaster, and the embarrassing results are often set right by ATA's own members," he said. "Our association devotes considerable resources to highlighting the significant legal and even liability risks companies are exposed to from mistranslations of standards, policies, practices, confidentiality provisions and other critical components at the hands of untrained volunteers."

#### **ABOUT ATA**

The American Translators Association (ATA) is the largest association of professional translators and interpreters in North America. With more than 10,000 members in over 90 countries, ATA offers certification, professional development and training to linguists, and best-practice guidance to users of translation and interpreting services worldwide.

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Mr. Jeff Weiner  
Chief Executive Officer  
LinkedIn Corporation  
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Mountain View, CA 94043

VIA FACSIMILE

Dear Mr. Weiner,

LinkedIn recently contacted the professional translators on its books with a “customer survey” ostensibly seeking feedback to improve its service to them.

From the survey’s second question it was clear that the “survey” was in fact a disingenuous attempt to identify the lure that would land translators prepared to localize LinkedIn texts for free (“for fun”) or for a token payment (“a badge”).

On behalf of the largest association of professional translators in North America, the American Translators Association (ATA), I object to your initiative on two grounds.


1. Many of our members are happy to donate time and expertise to charities and not-for-profit institutions, and the ATA actively promotes contributions to deserving pro bono projects.

But there is a difference between helping a charitable organization and providing a free service to a for-profit business like LinkedIn. Since we assume you employ professional programmers, marketers, accountants, legal advisers and copywriters, and pay them professional rates, your appeal for “translation volunteers” is incongruous to say the least. That a professional social networking site would use the profiles of its own clients to solicit free translations from career linguists is both disappointing and thoroughly unprofessional.

2. The crowdsourcing model cannot work unless volunteers are competent. Companies seeking global reach regularly lose face and money by relying on amateurs to translate key materials, and the embarrassing results are generally set right by professional translators.

Regardless of the area – law, IT, accounting, or translation – the safe bet for a global business is to work with a qualified professional. We urge you to practice the professionalism you preach and support your member translators rather than exploiting them.

Sincerely,



Jiri Stejskal, PhD  
President of the American Translators Association

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