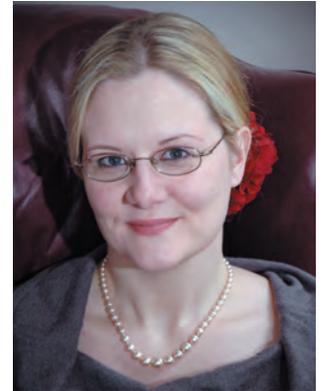


## A tale of two toothbrushes



I'd like to tell you the story of a toothbrush. A toothbrush, you ask? Yes. A toothbrush. This little toothbrush, according to the manufacturer's website, "is the world's first smart toothbrush, a manual brush that monitors your oral hygiene habits and reports them to a smartphone app." In other words, if you want to make sure your children or spouse brushed their teeth today, you can "check up" in an app that tells you. It's an invention whose time, as I'm sure dentists and parents everywhere are saying, has come.

On February 24, 2014, Procter & Gamble (P&G) debuted "the world's first interactive electric toothbrush" at Mobile World Congress. The problem? That's not the toothbrush my story's about. The toothbrush I'm talking about was launched in January 2013 by a Louisville, Kentucky-based company called Beam Technologies.

Now, it's important that I say Procter & Gamble is telling the truth. Full disclosure here, In Every Language has relationships with both Procter & Gamble and Beam Technologies and takes no side in this tale of two toothbrushes. Procter & Gamble's brush — sold under its Oral B brand — is the world's first interactive electronic toothbrush. That's because the Beam Brush is a manual toothbrush.

Let's stop real quick for a pop quiz. Before this article, had you ever heard of Procter & Gamble? I'm going to take that as a yes.

Next question: Had you ever heard of Beam Technologies? I'm going to assume that's a no.

Procter & Gamble had over 121,000 employees and \$83 billion in worldwide sales during 2013. While Beam Technologies does not release revenue figures, the number of employees it boasts is three. This is not a story of David and Goliath. This is a story of a bacteria-molecule-on-the-wing-of-the-fly-on-David and Goliath.

Were I in the same position that Alex Frommeyer, Beam Technologies' cofounder, now finds himself in, it might be easy to give up. But Beam Technologies has actually seen what he calls "a huge spike" in business. And who does Frommeyer thank for it? Procter & Gamble.

"P&G is excellent market validation," Frommeyer told me in a private interview. Having put the last three years of his life into building the business, Frommeyer spent a lot of time before Procter & Gamble's announcement trying to sell a product most people didn't understand. "West Coast investors said, 'We don't believe you that this is a thing.'" These same investors told him to come back "when customers are flocking to [you]."

Well, flocking they are. In the six weeks following Procter & Gamble's announcement, Beam Technologies saw a 30%-50% increase in website traffic. Since Procter & Gamble's toothbrush isn't yet commercially available in the United States, customers who want to buy now have no choice but to buy from Beam. The result of Procter & Gamble's announcement "has been very tangible," Frommeyer told me. "You can see P&G's announcement, then the results. You can see the increase for us."

The translation industry itself is not without its own deeper-pocket disruptors. It only takes one look at Smartling to see that in the four years since the New York-based company opened, the way corporations purchase website translation has changed. The idea that raising \$38.1 million total in venture capital was even a possibility for an industry company was laughable before

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Smartling came on the scene. After telling Frommeyer about Smartling's latest \$24 million C round, his reaction was "In translation? Really?"

But Smartling is not alone. In January 2014, One Hour Translation announced the close of a \$10 million Series A. Last year, Frontier Capital put \$10.3 million into MultiLing. But because these figures of course pale in comparison to \$38.1 million, you could call Smartling the language industry's own Procter & Gamble. They are the huge company that's created a new idea – in-format website localization – from a preexisting one – website translation.

And there's nothing wrong with that. That's business. Even Frommeyer himself will be the first to admit that Procter & Gamble's creation of a similar product is logical. Procter & Gamble even gave Beam Technologies a heads-up. Frommeyer does not see Procter & Gamble as a threat to the Beam Brush, but rather as a disruptor to the toothbrush industry

as a whole, just like his company was a year and a half ago. This is how business goes, Frommeyer believes, especially in tech, adding that when you're a revolutionary, "It exposes you to even bigger competitors coming in and disrupting the disrupter." The question then becomes not what Procter & Gamble's announcement is going to do to his sales, but what the next toothbrush is going to do to both Beam and Procter & Gamble.

I personally find Beam Technologies' approach to all this refreshing. Instead of picking up their leftover toothbrushes and going home, Beam Technologies is staying positive. And they're also letting Procter & Gamble do the heavy lifting when it comes to client education. "We've hardly spent a dime on marketing," Frommeyer told me. But February 2014, the month of the announcement, was Beam Technologies' best sales month ever. Since the announcement, the company has been interviewed by *The Wall Street Journal*,

*Christian Science Monitor*, Bloomberg Media Group and also yours truly. When asked to describe in one word how this disruption has affected his business, Frommeyer's word is "money."

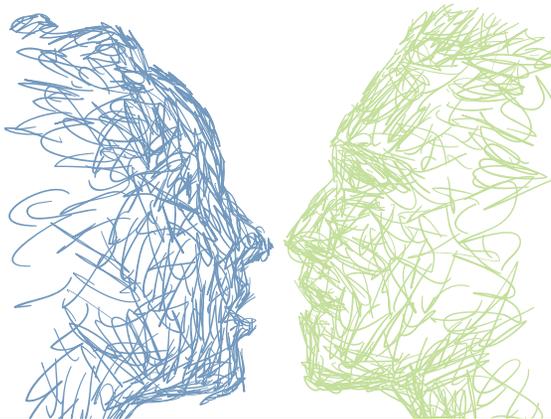
If I were to ask our industry the same question – what one word you would use to describe how the introduction of Smartling has impacted your translation company – what would that word be? Would it be "money"?

What will it take for our industry to react like Beam Technologies does? How much longer must that word be anything other than "money"?

Frommeyer's outside take on translation companies that don't embrace Smartling or similar disruptors with open arms? "The way all these small translation shops have felt is the same way the boat industry felt after the steam engine came around and you no longer needed paddles to go. [Disruption] is how business works. It's how it's worked for centuries."

Well said, toothbrush man. Well said. **M**

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