

A Business Carol

Adapted by

Hans Fenstermacher

(with apologies to Charles Dickens)



GLOBALIZATION'S GHOST

Globalization was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The elimination of its budget was signed by the VP, the Director of Development, and the Chief Financial Officer. Scrooge signed it. And Ebenezer Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Globalization was as dead as a doornail.

As Scrooge sat at his desk, huddled over his product roadmap and spreadsheets, he counted the money that Localization's removal would save him. Tomorrow was First Customer Ship day, and while the staff would celebrate the release of the multilingual product, Scrooge knew this would be their last. Soon he would not have to deal with all those irritating languages and markets, and he could stop hearing about the petty linguistic "requirements" of those customers and their "experiences."

"Bah!" he exclaimed aloud to no one in particular. "Humbug!" he added for good measure. His company produced a fine product; it stood on its own without all this language folderol. Hadn't he always been able to use products perfectly well in English? Of course, he had.

But soon he became aware of a ghostly presence. "How now!" said Scrooge, caustic and cold as ever. "What do you want with me?"

"Much!" said the presence, now appearing intensely familiar to Scrooge.

"Who are you?"

"Ask me who I was."

"Who were you, then?" said Scrooge, raising his voice. "You're peculiarly familiar."

"In life I was your partner, Globalization. I am here to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer." Scrooge felt as if he was entering a fog. "You will be haunted by Three Spirits."

THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS

When Scrooge awoke it was so foggy, that he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his office. Suddenly, the door to his office opened, and Scrooge found himself face to face with an unearthly visitor. "Who and what are you?" Scrooge demanded.

"I am the Ghost of Localization Past."

"Long Past?" inquired Scrooge, observant of the Ghost's dwarfish stature.

"No. Your past."

"For what purpose are you here?" Scrooge screeched.

"Your welfare!" said the Ghost, "Rise! and walk with me!"

As they walked through the company, they passed cubicles and offices with staff busily working. Drifting through the Technical Publications department, Scrooge heard writers and their managers speaking of usability, customer experiences, return on investment, content management, translation, and global markets. He wondered how they could possibly have so much interest in these things.

The Ghost led him through the main door of the office, but instead of passing into the lobby, they entered a different office from long ago. Here Scrooge beheld a young man, eagerly developing some kind of documentation. In this man, Scrooge recognized himself as a junior techni-

cal writer. How he marveled at his own youthful enthusiasm, reading, writing, studying product specs!

“I wish,” Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket, and looking about him. “But it’s too late now.” “What is the matter?” asked the Spirit. “Nothing,” said Scrooge. “Nothing. There was a manager asking for a new translation budget at my door last night. I should like to have given him something. That’s all.”

As the Ghost and Scrooge continued their journey, the scene changed again.

Now Scrooge saw himself as a young manager of a small documentation department. It was the eve of First Customer Ship day, and their product was going out in 11 languages simultaneously. The spirit of the scene was vital and jovial as the team celebrated its hard-won product success.

The door opened and the Product Development Director entered with a big smile. He handed out small bonuses to the whole team for meeting the rigorous schedule and completing the complex, multilingual project. The team beamed with satisfaction. Then he promptly sent them off to celebrate. At this, the Ghost of Localization Past muttered, “I don’t know what the fuss is about. All they’ve done is waste the company’s money.”

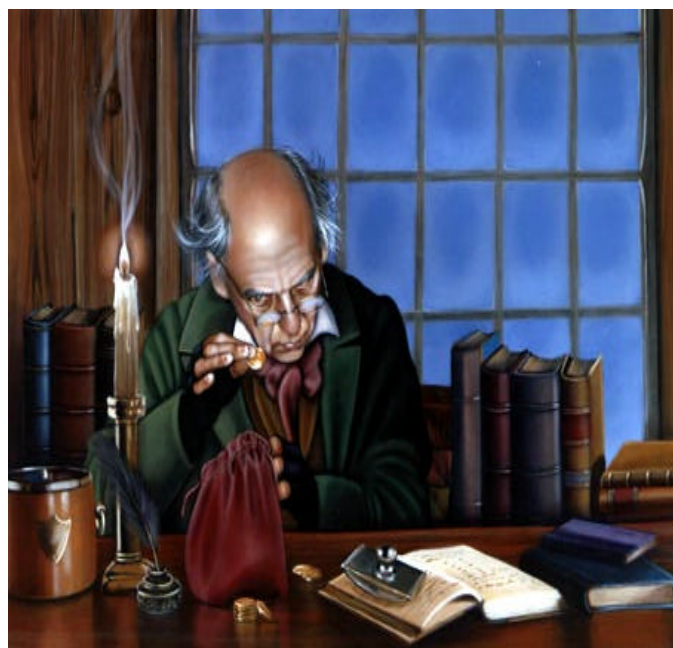
“It isn’t that,” said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter self. “It isn’t that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil.” And Scrooge turned away with a peculiar expression on his face. The Ghost inquired, “What is it?”

“It’s nothing,” said Scrooge. “I should like to be able to say a word or two to my localization manager just now. That’s all.”

Scrooge rubbed his eyes. As he looked up, he saw himself as an older man now; a man in the prime of life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years; but it had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. Next to him sat someone who was clearly a User-Customer of his product. “You are changed,” said the User. Before Scrooge could protest, the User continued, “Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both younger and newer at this, until, in good season, we could improve our relationship by our patient industry. But you are changed. When the contract was made you were another man.”

“No more!” cried Scrooge. “No more! I don’t wish to see it. Show me no more!”

But the relentless Ghost forced him to turn and observe what happened next.



Here he saw many more Users, and the scene was much different. They were using a competitor’s product and they were very happy with it, even delighted. On one computer monitor, Scrooge saw a localized user interface; on another desk lay translated documentation being studied. In the next cubicle, a User was perusing the product website in her native language, calling a colleague over to help decide on which product upgrades to buy. The group’s manager was on the phone, exclaiming over the product and recommending it to colleagues. The shouts of wonder and delight with which the development of every package was received!

“Say,” said one User, turning to his colleague with a smile, “I heard about somebody you know this afternoon.” “Who was it?” “Mr. Scrooge. I passed by their offices. His product lies upon the point of death, I hear; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe.”

“Spirit!” said Scrooge in a broken voice, “remove me from this place.”

THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS

As the Spirit lifted his hand, Scrooge became aware that this was not the same ghost he had just been with. “I am the Ghost of Localization Present,” said the Spirit. “Look upon me!” “Spirit,” said Scrooge submissively, “conduct me where you will. I went forth last time on compulsion, and I learned a lesson which is working now. Now, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it.”

They passed through a product development world of plenty: opulent budgets, scores of writers, ample time to complete projects, resources for usability studies, and more. The products were available in many, many markets with completely localized product materials:

interface, documentation, on-line help, multilingual call centers, web sites, FAQs. There was more than enough information to go around. To Scrooge, this was a remarkable sight.

But as they went on, the available offerings began to thin out, and they reached successively poorer markets. They arrived in one particular foreign market apparently on First Customer Ship day. "I recognize this market, but cannot recall its name," said Scrooge as he faintly remembered the miniscule localization budget he had allocated for this market.

What a stark contrast with the opulent offering Scrooge had just seen! Only the interface was localized, along with some sparse web pages, and a set of meager release notes. Still, the users treated this offering as a veritable feast. They were grateful for even these localized scraps. "God bless us, every one!" said Tiny Tim, a representative of a small, but promising overseas market segment.

"I see a vacant cubicle," offered the Ghost, "in the corner, and a chair without an owner. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, this market will die." "No, no," said Scrooge. "Oh no, kind Spirit! Say Tiny Tim's market will be spared."

The Ghost and Scrooge passed across the seas to distant lands, and they found a multitude of users celebrating the localized product's arrival, no matter how meager it was. Then they came upon the office's of Scrooge's overseas subsidiary. Scrooge recognized everyone and was pleased that they were celebrating the new product. Soon, though, they all began to argue over Scrooge's stinginess in supplying localized products. They complained about how hard it was to sell without localization, how often they had to deal with unsatisfied customers, how many times they had to defend themselves against competitors' products that were available in the local language. "I have no patience with him," observed Scrooge's main distributor. The other supply channel partners expressed the same opinion.

As Scrooge looked up from this disturbing scene, the Ghost parted his cloak to reveal two wretched children. "Are these your children?" asked Scrooge, appalled. "They are yours," said the Spirit. "And they cling to me, appealing to their father. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware of them both, and all of their degree, but most

of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased."

THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS

Horrified, Scrooge turned away only to confront the third Ghost as was foretold. "I am in the presence of the Ghost of Localization Yet to Come?" said Scrooge, but the Ghost led him silently down the hall toward a group of company employees talking. "No," said one, "I don't know much about it either way. I only know he's gone." "Did they fire him?" inquired another. "Most certainly," said a third.

Scrooge recognized the company as his own, but he saw no likeness of himself anywhere. He and the Ghost passed group after group of staff recounting this man's dismissal with no particular emotion. Many of them had already set about claiming various of the man's former items.

One rolled the man's chair down the hall, another grabbed his handsome desk clock, and a third rummaged through his desk drawers for all manner of valuable paraphernalia.

Scrooge looked out the window to see a man leaving the building. With one hand he clutched the lapels of his jacket in a futile effort to block the icy wind; with his other hand, he clumsily held a cardboard box bearing the company logo, out of which jutted a jumble of belongings clearly tossed together in haste.

"Am I that man?" asked Scrooge. But the Ghost did not reply. "If there is any person

in the company who feels emotion caused by this man's departure," said Scrooge, quite agonized, "show that person to me, Spirit, I beseech you!"

The Ghost silently pointed to another room. As Scrooge entered, he recognized the offices of his localization vendor. But he found no relief from his agony here. "All he ever did was browbeat us on price," said one. "The deadlines were always monstrous, and he constantly changed the specs, then expected us to redo everything, without a penny more in charges," complained another. "What about his successor?" asked the president. "It would be bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a client in his successor. We may sleep tonight with light hearts," said the business development manager. Yes. Soften it as they would, their hearts were lighter. The project managers' faces, hushed and clustered round to hear, were brighter; and it was a happier house for this man's disappearance!





The only emotion that the Ghost could show him, caused by the event, was one of pleasure.

“Specter,” said Scrooge, “something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it but I know not how. Tell me what man that was whom we saw leaving the building?”

The Ghost, ever silent, pointed to a desk with a notice of dismissal on it. “Before I draw nearer to the desk,” said Scrooge, “answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of the things that May be only? Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me by an altered life?”

The Spirit’s kind hand trembled, pointing. Scrooge crept toward the desk, trembling as he went, and, following the finger, read upon the dismissal notice his own name, EBENEZER SCROOGE.

And Scrooge cried out, “I will honor Localization in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this notice!” Holding up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom’s hood and dress. It shrank, collapsed, and dwindled down into a computer monitor.

THE END OF IT

Yes! and the monitor was his own. The desk was his own, the office was his own. Best and happiest of all, the time before him was his own, to make amends in!

“I don’t know what to do!” cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath, and making a perfect buffoon of himself. “I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy, I am as giddy as a drunken man.”

Running to the door, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring. Glorious! “What’s today?” cried Scrooge, calling down the hall to an employee, who perhaps had loitered to look in on him. “Eh?” returned the employee in wonder. “What’s today, my fine fellow?” said Scrooge. “Today!” replied the employee. “Why, First Customer Ship day.”

Scrooge ran down the corridor, poking his head into offices, congratulating staff, thanking them for their hard work. At the end of the hall, he burst into the office of Bob Cratchit, his longtime localization manager, who was cleaning out his desk, there being, obviously, no further need for his services. “Now, I’ll tell you what, my friend,” said Scrooge. “I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore,” he continued, leaping forward and giving Bob such a dig in the ribs that he staggered back — “and therefore I am about to raise your budget!”

“A merry First Customer Ship day, Bob!” said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. “A merrier FCS, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I’ll raise your salary, and endeavor to assist your struggling team, and we will discuss the new product roadmap this very afternoon, over a celebratory lunch, Bob!”

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more. And it was always said of him that he knew how to keep Localization well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless us, every one!

A note from Hans Fenstermacher: I hope you will accept the above adaptation of A Christmas Carol in the spirit in which it is intended. May you and your loved ones enjoy a very happy holiday and a healthy, joyful New Year!

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