

Interview with OOONA's CEO - Wayne Garb



Wayne is a man of few words that shies away from publicity. He is a private person who doesn't do interviews and you will rarely see him in industry panels at events, though before the pandemic he was always catching a plane to visit client premises and attend the next conference or trade show, where you were guaranteed to find him among the audience, or having one-to-one discussions at the company stand. It wasn't easy to get him to agree to this interview, but once he started talking about the company he co-founded he surprised himself by how much he had to say...

Q: What is the story behind OOONA? How did you decide to set up this company?

A: OOONA was founded because we needed a platform to manage internal subtitling work at a localization company in Tel Aviv, TransTitles. After searching the market for such a platform and saw there wasn't one, we decided to hire a company to build it for us. To cut a long story short, things didn't go well and Gal, OOONA's CTO now, was sent to smooth things over - that was the start of a great partnership. Since there was a gap in the market, we realized that this would be a product that would be of interest commercially to other language service providers (LSPs) too, so we decided to set up OOONA as a separate company, as we don't believe an LSP can be a software neutral company.

Q: How did things evolve for OOONA? How did you come to be the company you are today?

A: OOONA started off as a translation management platform for media localization work - the web-based timed-text tools came later. The original demand for the tools came from our platform clients, who needed time-text tools to upload materials and have their production teams check them and make edits.

We built the timed-text tools separately and fully integrated them into the management platform, but kept the whole thing modular so clients could choose to license only the management platform, or only the tools or some of them, or go for the complete end-to-end solution, which we call OOONA Integrated. We used to handle only subtitle and caption files, but now we also handle scripts, metadata, synopses and a lot of other information around video content in order to automate and streamline the workflow for our users.

Q: How do you see the company's place in the market now? What would you say is your main competitive advantage?

A: I believe we are the only fully integrated, secure and certified, web-based platform that works on all main operating systems which is not an LSP. As such, I don't think we have a lot of competition. We offer professional, state-of-the-art tools for audiovisual localization at realistic prices starting with pay-as-you-go weekly subscriptions, so we can be affordable just as much to freelancers as to large enterprises.

Q: You bring up AWS and security often in conversation - why is that?

A: As our client base grew in the past few years, we realized we needed to be on AWS and guarantee the security of our clients' content. Security is indispensable for growth, as no major content owner will trust or be willing to work with vendors that do not satisfy this condition. So we spent an entire year carrying out multiple penetration tests, we got our ISO 27001 certification and we've recently passed a number of security audits from major streaming platforms too. We also invested a lot of money to create a scalable solution. We wanted our system to be elastic in terms of the number of users it can support - and we have thousands of users all over the world. We work with an external company who are an AWS partner and offer 24/7/365 support. We have multiple servers on AWS and the system scales automatically according to load, CPU usage and traffic. This

ensures our users' experience of the platform is always smooth and it helps me sleep better at night.

Q: What's on your development roadmap?

A: We've always been driven by the market needs and demands. Our primary goal is to be a one-stop-shop for our clients. But we don't believe in reinventing the wheel, so when a tool already exists that fits a specific purpose well, we use APIs to integrate it so as to be able to offer it to our clients. We wish to offer them to a selection of everything they could possibly need, integrated into a single workflow. As an example, we work with AppTek for speech recognition and machine translation because they offer specialized models for the media market. We are also in the middle of a proof of concept with companies that offer translation memory tools, which is something that is requested a lot by our users. Translation automation in general is a very hot topic right now and it is certainly on our roadmap. Our aim is to create tools that the end users love to work with, so we use input from translators to guide us on this. In short, we see ourselves at the heart of the localization workflow, as the core platform that integrates everything our clients require to fulfill any need they have.

Q: What is your vision for the company?

A: A lot of people ask me this question. We don't see OOONA today as a software company with a set of products; we see it as a complete solution that services all the needs of the media localization market. We strive to offer literally everyone the ability to have access to great localization software, so even a single subtitler could start their own business and have the comfort of working in the same system that a large

“We want OOONA to be a brand synonymous with the media market, that can cover any localization need, whether it's for production, training or resource onboarding purposes”

company does and enjoy all the benefits that come with it. It's about supporting the market and making it sustainable. We want OOONA to be a brand synonymous with the media market, that can cover any localization need, whether it's for production, training or resource onboarding purposes. This is why we developed an educational platform as well, so people could continue being trained properly, especially in the midst of the pandemic - there are currently 25 universities and colleges using our EDU platform. It's also why we took the initiative to create the infrastructure for the POOL, with the support of many LSPs, academics, unions and translators themselves. We're actually reaching out to other software providers as we speak, because we want everyone to be a part of it.

Q: What's next for OOONA?

A: We have a great team at OOONA that continuously goes above and beyond expectations and who our clients love working with. So, first of all, we want our staff to continue to feel part of the company and enjoy working here. It's been a bit like working with family all these years and we don't want to lose that feeling - that's important to us. We also aspire to be the industry standard when it comes to enterprise-level tools for the media space. We need to expand as a company, as the market is demanding more and we must expand to meet this demand. We want to keep being the best management and production solution out there while having as wide a reach as possible. So we have plans for expanding in new locations too - but let's leave that for the next interview. ■ <https://ooona.net>



OOONA Tools user interface