

Three single steps on a journey of a thousand miles

These days, there is no dearth of capacity building trainings; yet, we believe APTLD has successfully completed three quite unique ones.

The story has a trivial beginning: with 7 kinds of Fellowships awarded to 15 APTLD community representatives in 2018 alone, the APTLD Board recognized the need for taking Association's capacity-building efforts to the next level and endorsed a pilot training for the .IQ registry team on condition that it should meet a few key requirements:

- Relevance: the training should match the .IQ registry's needs;
- Professionalism: it should be developed with a due account of a proper teaching methodology;
- Universality: its core content should remain relevant, with possible minor adjustments, for other APTLD members;
- For Members by Members: the requirement implied a maximum engagement of APTLD Members ready and willing to spare their time – and at times even funding – to get training delivered;
- Cost-saving: where possible, the training should allow economies of scale

With such a guidance, the APTLD staff spent several months working on the curriculum and engaging APTLD Members' representatives and other interested parties to volunteer for the mission.

Eventually, the core team has banded together – it included Joe Alagna (Afiliias), Dusan Stojicevic (Gransy s.r.o.), Leonid Todorov, as well as Munir Badr of AEServer, a UAE-based registrar, and Patrick Myles of NetKnowledge, an APTLD contractor. Later, we also invited Dmitro Kohmanyuk from .UA registry, Mikhail Anisimov from .RU, and Alena Belskaya from .BY. In addition, ICANN representatives joined us to deliver individual sessions- the value they added to the trainings was truly outstanding and full credit should go to Fahd Batayneh, Champika Wijayatunga and Abdalmonem Tharwat Galila in that regard.

As well, at a later stage, we engaged with the .AE registry team who also provided a very meaningful

support and complemented the curriculum by hosting a .IQ's inception/study visit to the TRA premises in Dubai.

The faculty group's discussions and preparations were conducted via Skype and Adobe bridge, with APTLD staff facilitating communication and performing the clerical/secretarial functions.

As a separate track, APTLD promptly secured a venue and completed logistics preparations: early bookings at more than affordable prices allowed substantial economies of scale.

As well, co-located with APTLD75 held in Dubai, the training enabled the 4-strong .IQ team to benefit from the regular pre-Meeting trainings and the Members Meeting itself, thus making up a total of 6 days of a quite intense absorbing of new knowledge and networking – for the first time for 3 out of 4 trainees - with the community.

Curriculum-wise, we developed a simple questionnaire for trainees to run a self-assessment prior to and after the training to enable them to check their progress.

The initial curriculum was built in response to .IQ's request for a course in marketing, with a specific emphasis on IDNs. As it was impossible to check their expertise, it called for a tailored curriculum to effectively compress a sophisticated course (remember, there is no university course on a ccTLD-related marketing) into two days plus an extra day for a regular general pre-Meeting marketing training day for the APTLD Membership.

The classes proved a well-balanced blend of lectures, trainings per se, and intense coaching and counseling sessions. While the actual content probably is to remain under APTLD's unregistered "copyright", the trainees seem to have benefited from an immediate interaction with trainers and coaches and a very consistent curriculum, which allowed both the faculty and trainees to revisit certain issues from a different perspective, discuss side topics and even hold improvised Qs and As sessions; equally important proved the emphasis on case studies with a very detailed first-hand analysis thereof.

In addition, as noted above, the inception/study visit to the .AE registry premises enabled the trainees to capture a detailed picture of an exemplary registry's

modus operandi – indeed, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Yet another critical element that contributed greatly to the overall success of the pilot exercise was that some faculty members could easily switch to Arabic to elaborate on certain issues, which helped the trainees absorb and tackle quite sophisticated problems.

Needless to say, post-training, all the slide decks and other materials were made fully available to the .IQ team; in addition, all the classes were videotaped.

The feedback we received on the spot and thereafter was very positive.

The marketing class engendered a number of unexpected yet positive spillover effects. First, apparently by word of mouth, the .OM registry team was quick to invite the core faculty group to Muscat right after APTLD75. Marketing sessions delivered for the .OM registry during just one day were adjusted with account of their very detailed requests and in realization of the fact that the .OM staff are much more versed in the subject matter. There also was Day 2 which was all about counseling sessions delivered by some faculty members on very specific topics.

Concomitantly, we launched preparations for yet another round of training classes –this time, for the .AF registry. Understandably, it could not be delivered in Kabul; given that we had managed to save more than a half of the original budget, the decision was made to fly an .AF team to the neighboring Uzbekistan and to have the classes be hosted by the .UZ team.

Co-sponsored by auDA, which agreed to procure air tickets for the .AF team (not an easy walk when you deal with an Afghani air carrier, mind you) and .UZ, and featuring ICANN trainers on DNSSEC and IDN Deployment, the training proved a smashing success. Notably, there is only one weekly flight between Kabul and Tashkent, Uzbekistan’s capital. That compelled us to once again revise the curriculum and include a two-track day (as IDN-related issues are of no relevance to .UZ, there was organized an on-request counseling on domain names auctions for them). Ultimately, the classes took a total of six days and became yet even more sophisticated mixture of lectures, coaching, networking and counseling sessions. On the host team’s suggestion, the event kicked off on the 24th

anniversary of .UZ and was covered by the national media.

After delivering 3 training sessions in just 4 months, there certainly are some lessons for the community to learn and promote:

First, we tend to be ignorant, or at best overestimate, one’s level of expertise. We should operate under we-do-not-know-what-they-do-not-know assumption. Hence, some initial testing of trainees is a must.

Second, previously, there had been no systematic effort to develop a consistent and methodologically accurate curriculum. Teaching is a science and demands a set of mandatory competences. Also, enthusiasm is a poor substitute for teaching skills. There should be no room for amateurs or those keen just to tick a KPIs box– after all, we all are against experiments on human beings, aren’t we? That also refers to curriculum development.

Third, good will and collaboration are key prerequisites for success. The APTLD community and our friends and associates have proved both generous and capable of promptly pulling together human and financial resources to get the things done. Meanwhile, in full compliance with our Mission APTLD ensured the impetus and facilitated the process implementation.

Fourth, funding is essential but not as critical as one would think, at least on the initial stage: thanks in part to our Members’ sponsorship and in a far larger part – to APTLD’s fiscal realism and discipline, we managed to conduct two trainings – for .IQ and .AF/.UZ – on a budget for just one.

That, in fifth, however, does not warrant the much-needed consistency in the longer run as such training should be held periodically. That is why APTLD is now on a lookout for external funding and a serious institutional partner to raise our faculty’s academic profile.

Last but not least, we are in touch with our sister organizations as we are ready to share our unique experience – who knows, it may well happen that one day, we may crown our thousand-mile journey having a joint class for our Memberships?