

Speedy SCRIPTURE

By
Kristen
Manieri

WYCLIFFE BIBLE TRANSLATORS GOES HIGH TECH TO PROMOTE THE WORLD'S BEST SELLER.

»» Chris and Christie Winkler and their two-year-old son, Judah, are a long way from Orlando. For the last year and a half, they've been living in Africa, where they operate a central office that supports nearly 100 Bible-translation projects throughout Nigeria, a country that has 500 different languages, 300 of which do not have Bible translations.

The Winklers are missionaries with Wycliffe Bible Translators, the world's largest Bible-translating organization. Founded in 1942 by missionary William Cameron Townsend, Wycliffe originally was located in Orange County, California, but in 2000 moved to Orlando, where a lower cost of living was more favorable to its missionary families.

The process of translating the Bible into the remaining 2,100 languages in the world begins in Orlando at Wycliffe's 148,000-square-foot U.S. headquarters. The company's mission — to give every person on the planet access to a Bible in his own language — is hardly a modern one. In fact, Wycliffe's name gives a shout out to John Wycliffe, a 14th century preacher who is credited with translating the New Testament into English for the first time. Back then, it took a lifetime to translate a Bible; these days, it can take less than 10 years. And while the reason for translating Bibles hasn't changed at all in the last several centuries, the methods definitely have.

Thanks to innovations in telecommunications, computers, and software, Wycliffe is in the midst of the greatest acceleration of Bible translation in history. At this moment, there are more than 7,000 Wycliffe missionaries at work



Orlando-based Wycliffe uses the latest technology to introduce the Bible to remote cultures in their native language.

on over 1,500 Bible translations around the globe. It's a process that involves linguists, translators, support staff and nationals, and one that often begins with the creation of an alphabet, since many of the world's languages are oral only. Next, reading materials are designed and the process of teaching the locals to read their own language ensues. Information about AIDS and other health-related materials are also translated, an initiative that not only solidifies the team's standing within the

community, but one that has quite possibly saved thousands of lives.

Once the team begins documenting and dissecting the language, translators start utilizing software called Adapt It. "This program allows a translator to take two related languages — one of which has the Bible and the other which has yet to be translated — input data, and quickly start to generate a translation in the language still in need," Chris Winkler says. "This means that certain translation tasks that used to



Wycliffe creates alphabets to teach villagers to read their own language.

take years can now be done in a just a matter of months.”

Technology not only assists in the translation process, but also keeps missionaries such as Winkler and his wife connected to the outside world. “We have a difficult time imagining life as a missionary without access to modern technology,” says Winkler. “We both have laptops, as well as local cell-phone options, including one that allows for inexpensive calls to the United States. We often use Skype, Facebook and e-mail to both carry out our work, as well as to connect with friends and family in the U.S.” (The Winklers even have their own blog: thosewinklers.wordpress.com.)

Of course, many such technological innovations would be futile if not for solar power and satellites, both of which are increasingly being deployed in some of Wycliffe’s most remote sites and which account for much of the company’s accelerated progress. With the help of JAARS, a partner organization, solar tools that power laptops, backup systems, and even refrigerators, are now being used by missionary families, who experience constant power-supply disruptions that can make completing daily tasks extremely difficult.

“At both our house and our office, we have solar technology that provides more consistent power,” says Winkler. “Nigeria just doesn’t generate enough power to provide electricity to the whole

country at all times. We never know when the power will go off or when it will come back on. From the time we had the solar backup system installed at our house, our quality of life improved dramatically and productivity also increased.”

Wycliffe also employs a handful of innovative satellite systems. These backpack-sized communication kits allow missionaries to quickly transmit video and data to team members in the U.S. “Communication used to be incredibly challenging,” Winkler says. “Now with improved satellite-phone and Internet capabilities, one team member can be in a hut in a rural village in Nigeria and the other can be sitting in an office in the United States, yet

they can be looking and talking through the same drafts and documents simultaneously. Instead of having to wait months for the team to be reunited in the field, conversations can take place in real time as the project progresses, shaving months and years off of the time needed to translate.”

Wycliffe plans to have more than 200 of these backpack systems deployed in the next few years.

The company’s dedication to using the latest technology has created more effective and efficient ways to introduce the Bible to even the most remote cultures. Thanks to Wycliffe, the one book that’s been the world’s best seller since it was first printed in 1456 will likely be able to maintain that status. 



At Wycliffe’s visitors center, figures represent real people around the world who help bring the Bible to new audiences.

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To allow scripture enthusiasts the opportunity to dive into the world of Bible translations, Wycliffe created the Wycliffe Discovery Center (formerly called WordSpring), a petite visitor’s experience tucked into a small corner of the company’s southeast Orlando headquarters.

Here, guests come face to face with nearly a dozen wax-like figures that represent the various cultures, countries, and languages in which Wycliffe has worked. The figures, dressed in their native attire, are exact replicas of real people involved in the translation process in far-off corners of the globe. Visitors press a red button by each to hear them read John 3:16 in their native tongue. Audio and video components bring Wycliffe’s mission to life, while interactive stations — such as the one that lets visitors see what their name looks like written in foreign letters — engage people in the translation process.

To learn more about the visitors center, visit www.wycliffe.org/wordspring.