



Remote simultaneous interpreting: time to start a dialogue.

RSI is one of the biggest technological developments for the profession. At the PRIMS meeting in London, members discussed how interpreters can shape its uptake.

Rob DAVIDSON.

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The second day of the [PRIMS Interregional meeting in London](#), Sunday 13 January 2019, offered AIIC members a unique opportunity to test and compare six remote interpreting platforms, and discuss their various merits and shortcomings. The agenda also included informative presentations on AIIC's guidelines for remote simultaneous interpreting (RSI), on the economics of RSI, and the Canadian Translation Bureau experiences of RSI.

Technological disruption

The presentations and discussions during the conference itself focused largely on **how AIIC members can continue to offer their clients the highest standards of service**, particularly in the current context of rapid technological innovations affecting conference interpreting. There was general agreement among delegates that just as technology has disrupted travel, accommodation, music, film, so too it is affecting the conference interpreting sector.

One of the most significant developments of recent years is Remote Simultaneous Interpreting (RSI), the technology-based system whereby rather than being located in the same room as conference speakers and delegates, the interpreters are 'remote' - operating from a distant site, which can be elsewhere in the venue or in another location altogether, in another country or in the interpreters' own offices.

In response to growing interest in remote interpreting among AIIC members the Association recently released its [Guidelines for Distance Interpreting](#), to provide minimum standards and best practice recommendations for professional interpreters and the conference industry.

Over the past few years, a number of commercial companies (several of whom participated in the London conference) have launched various RSI telecommunications platforms which provide this alternative to conference interpreters operating from booths located directly in the meeting room.

Benefits and challenges

Potential benefits for conference organisers were explored during the discussion: reduced

equipment rental costs, and lower flight and accommodation expenses– this could open the market to companies and institutions that often do without interpretation services for budgetary reasons. Additionally, RSI gives a greater ability to schedule last-minute meetings with people in different parts of the world.

Advantages for interpreters were also highlighted: the use of RSI allows for a more flexible working schedule and reduces the travel-related stress from their professional routine.

Furthermore, there are potential wider benefits: reduced travel curbs the environmental footprint of the conference industry, and could give people with physical disabilities better access to the profession.

But a key theme of the conference was how AIIC and its members can manage the challenges inherent in the use of RSI in order to guarantee the highest standards of service to their clients. This means providing consistently effective, high quality communication while managing the practical risks associated with the use of these systems.

The risks include anything from interruptions to communications due to power cuts or internet disruptions, to poor quality sound and visual input, to security and privacy issues.

The discussions also covered the relevant ethical and contractual issues, such as negotiating RSI assignments with clients while taking into consideration the appropriate ISO standards for simultaneous interpreting.

Interpreters must be involved

A clear conclusion of the 2-day conference was that **while RSI seems here to stay, interpreters must not simply accept it without any criticism.** They can – and should – be closely involved in the development process for this technology, identifying and advocating for the highest quality standards of RSI.

A step in this direction was taken at the conference itself, as the organisers had invited six different providers of RSI platforms to demonstrate their systems using the International Maritime Organisation's own interpreting booths in the venue.

Delegates had an opportunity to test the platforms and give feedback to the companies.

The general opinion was that there is still much room for improvement in the functionalities of RSI platforms, and that **technology providers and interpreters must work together** to fine-tune these systems in the interests of all.

Innovations in interpreting technology – and in RSI in particular – are something that all conference organisers, meeting planners and venue managers need to understand, as they are slowly but surely in the process of transforming our industry.

At the end of the day, participants expressed their appreciation to PRIMS for opening up this discussion, and including the providers. However, they stressed, much more dialogue between interpreters and other conference industry professionals is essential at this time.

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- See also [AIIC PRIMS Interregional Meeting - London](#) (login required)
 - Watch the [presentations](#) (login required)
 - See photos from [the PRIMS London meeting](#)
 - Read the AIIC [Guidelines for Distance Interpreting](#).



Rob Davidson, of [MICE Knowledge](#), an authority on current developments in the meeting, incentive, conference and events (MICE) industry, gave an introductory presentation at the PRIMS London meeting. A version of this article was previously published in [EventsBase](#) and in [Think MICE](#) (in Polish).

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