

Globalization translates into growth opportunity

A Web-based language testing company is looking to expand its reach

By **SHERRI BURI McDONALD**
The Register-Guard

Last academic year, 50,000 students in middle schools, high schools and colleges nationwide sat down at their computers and took a Web-based test to determine their proficiency in Spanish, Japanese, or one of five other foreign languages. Those tests, and the technology enabling them to be delivered over the Internet, were developed in Eugene by a company called Avant Assessment.

Now with 50 full-time employees — about half in Eugene and half in other parts of the country, or the world — the company bills itself as a global leader in Web-based language assessment for education, business and government.

"There aren't companies (worldwide) that have this blend of technology," said David Bong, 57, who with his wife, Sheila, became owners in the company shortly after it was founded in January 2001.

The company's main Web-based assessments are the Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency, or STAMP, test for foreign language proficiency, which was taken by about 50,000 students across the country last academic year, and the English Language Proficiency Assessment, or ELPA, which was taken by about 60,000 English language learners in Oregon's elementary and secondary schools last academic year.

Avant Assessment's product for English language learners, which uses headphones and microphones that hook up to computers, tests reading, writing, listening and speaking.

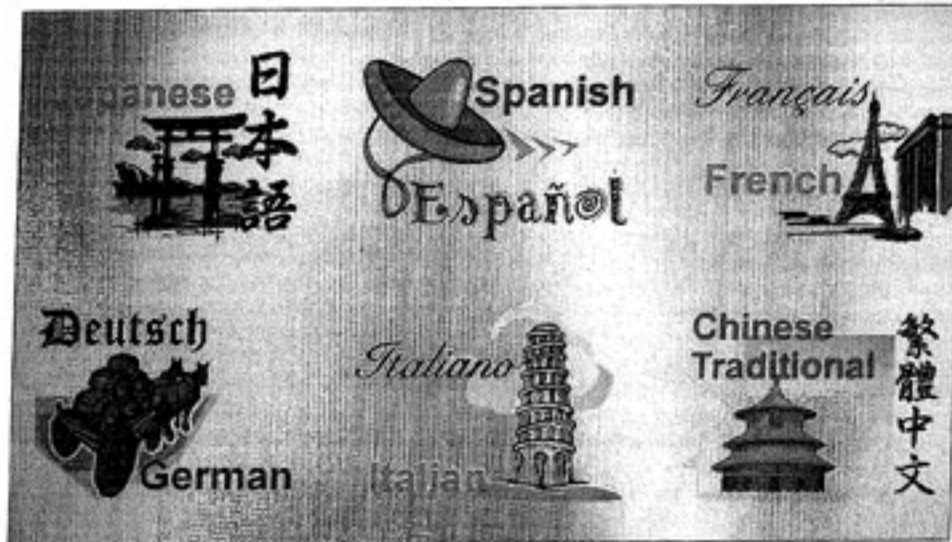
The product meets the federal requirements for testing English language acquisition skills, said Doug Kosty, an assistant superintendent at the Oregon Department of Education, who oversees assessment and information services.

"It's a more efficient and effective way of testing this population of kids," than the traditional paper tests that require a one-to-one teacher to test-taker ratio," he said.

Three years ago, Avant Assessment dipped its toe in international markets by developing an English learning tool for businesspeople in Japan that offers daily content from Dow Jones and the Wall Street Journal, at varying levels of difficulty, and assessment questions. The product has been critically acclaimed, but only moderately successful financially,

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Avant Assessment's Web site shows some of the languages it can test online. The company's software allows testing of a foreign language student's reading, writing and speaking skills.



AVANT ASSESSMENT

A leader in Web-based foreign language assessment in education, government and business

Founded: January 2001 by Carl Falsgraf, director of the UO Center for Applied Second Language Studies

Principal owners: David and Sheila Bong, John Haakanson and the University of Oregon Foundation.

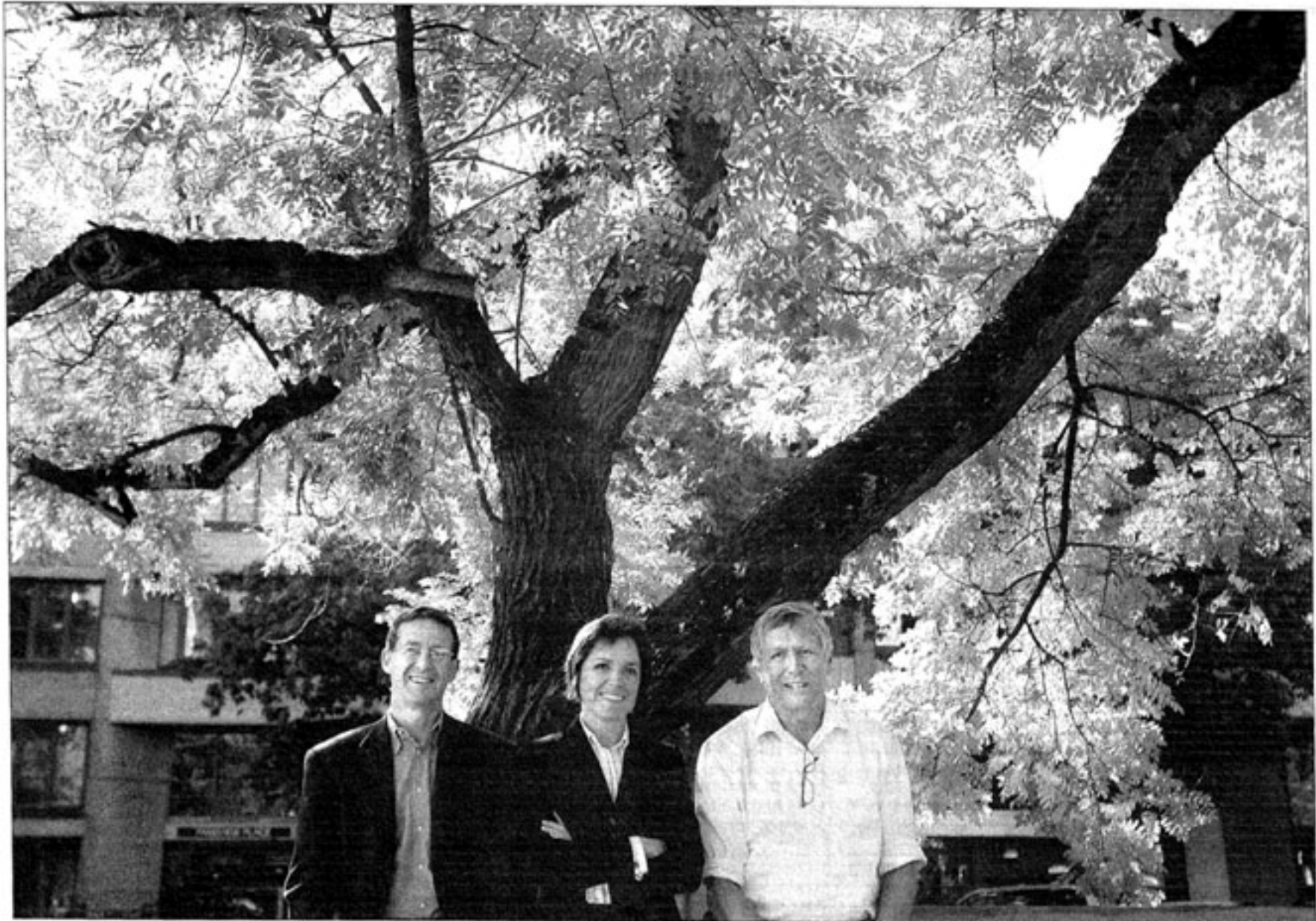
Employees: 50 full-time; about half in Eugene

Annual revenues: not disclosed

Web: avantassessment.com

“We haven’t even scratched the surface of the international opportunities out there.”

— DAVID BONG, CO-OWNER OF AVANT ASSESSMENT



KEVIN CLARK/The Register-Guard

David Bong (left) and his wife, Sheila, own Avant Assessment with John Haakanson. Avant Assessment develops Web-based foreign language proficiency tests for education, government, and business.