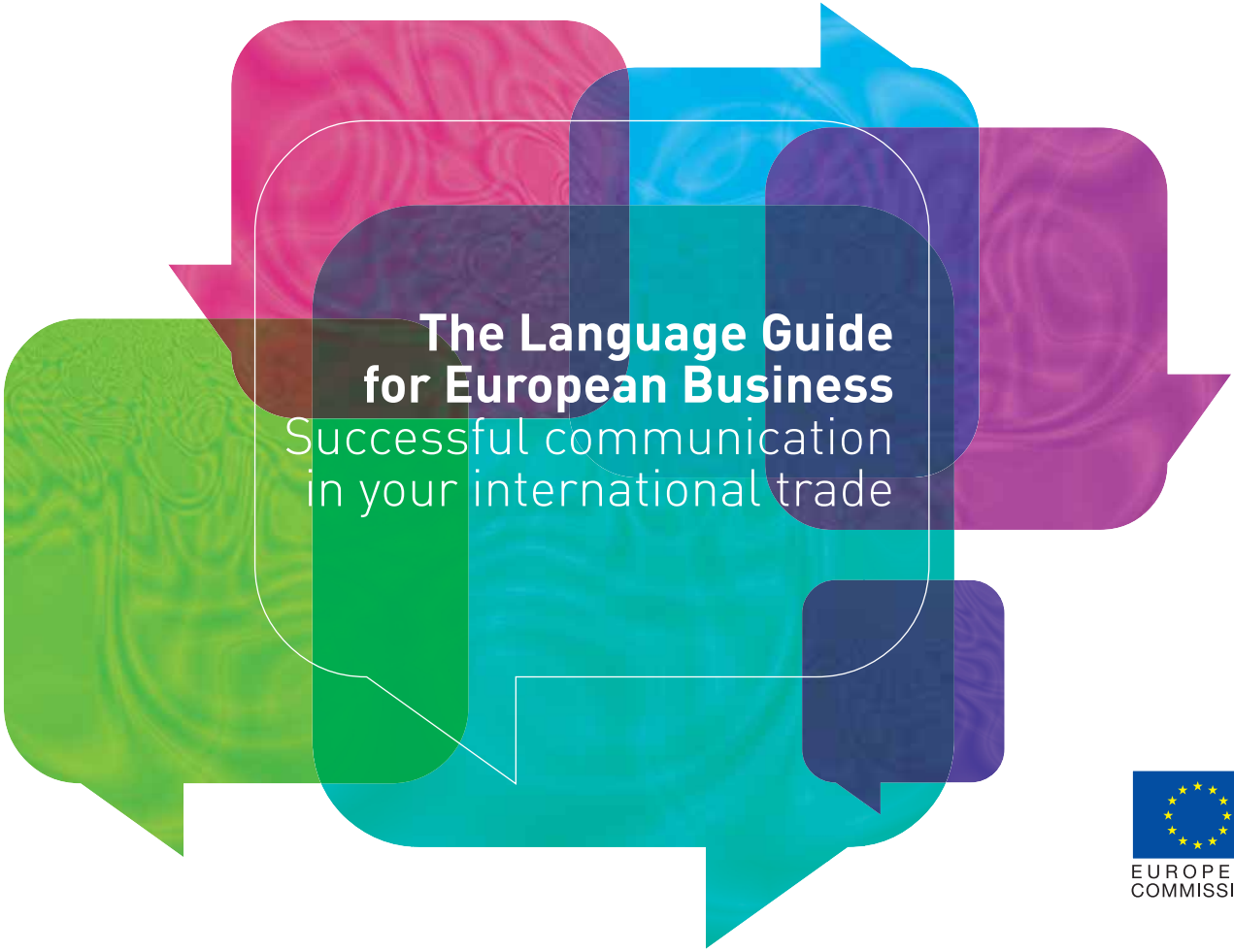


The Language Guide for European Business

Successful communication in your international trade

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The Language Guide for European Business

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Introduction

This guide is about solving your company's language and communication problems. It offers your company advice on how to deal with the language and cultural issues that arise every day in international business. It will help you develop a strategy for dealing with communication problems in new or expanding markets in other countries. Companies which have adopted similar language management strategies for foreign markets are generally more successful and achieve greater export sales growth.

The guide is produced by the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture and is part of the Commission's information initiative, following the 'PIMLICO' survey ([1]) of best practice in European exporting SMEs designed to promote the greater use of languages and language management strategies by European companies in their international trade. Many examples of the best language management practice identified by the PIMLICO survey are quoted in this guide: you can find out more on the European Commission's 'Languages Mean Business' website: *http://ec.europa.eu/languages/languages-mean-business*

Stephen Hagen
Guide Author

Chapter 1
Just how serious is the language problem?

Misunderstandings occur because of the failure to communicate.

Just over two in five European small and medium-sized companies are active in some form of international activity; about a quarter are involved in direct export. The larger the company, the more it tends to internationalise *(IES Study, 2010)* ([2]).

In the European Commission survey of exporting SMEs *(ELAN, 2006)* ([3]):

- Nearly half said they had a language management strategy.
- Over one in ten declared they had lost a contract for lack of foreign languages.
- Two out of five expected to acquire new language skills in the near future.

1.1 The cost of language gaps

According to the ELAN Study, amongst the nearly 200 companies that lost potential contracts for lack of foreign languages, 37 valued the lost business at between €8 million and €13.5 million. A further 54 companies had lost contracts between €16.5 million and €25.3 million, and 10 had lost contracts worth over €1 million.

Cultural differences are another related communication barrier, where about one in five European companies report problems. And it's not only in distant parts of the world that companies report the greatest cultural differences – they can also arise closer to home. Trading across Europe can mean having to negotiate business with hundreds of different national and regional cultures.

When companies are asked *where* language problems lie, they can't always be precise, but they know roughly the area or activity in which the communication gap arose:

Reasons listed by companies for their communication failures:
- Staff couldn't speak the language.
- Information inquiries or quotations weren't followed up on.
- A lack of confidence in using the foreign language.
- Breakdown on receiving foreign call at phone or switchboard.
- Errors in translation or interpreting.
- Inability to capitalise on opportunities.
- Lack of cultural affinity.

Source: ELAN Study (2006).

Failure can come in different forms, often due to a lack of native speakers:
"The company failed in Germany. The software was translated but the company didn't employ native German speakers to sell the product in their country. There was a lack of cultural strategy and vision. The German branch had to close down… and it has only reopened two years later."
(Everteam, France, PIMLICO Study)

This can also apply in certain markets where English is not used:
"The company started communicating with the Spanish market in English, but could not fully communicate. Once it employed an account manager who spoke perfect Spanish, the situation changed completely."
(Fotona, Slovenia, PIMLICO Study)

1.2 Where are your language and cultural needs most likely to occur?

Use of the customer's language is critical to your business prospects in a range of situations:
- Describing your business on your website.
- Complying with local laws and regulations and completing customs declarations.
- Preparing employees for secondment or posting abroad.
- Tendering for public procurement and other types of contracts.
- Drawing up contracts in the proper style and in conformity with local regulations.
- Attending court proceedings (such as pursuing bad debts and defending patents).
- Advertising and launching publicity campaigns abroad.
- Undertaking market research in a foreign market.
- Selecting and managing a local agent or distributor.
- Managing and training multilingual workforces at home and abroad.
- Providing customer care and ensuring the quality of after-sales service.
- Pursuing payment and recovering bad debt.
- Handling local documentation, protocols, in-house styles, and technical specifications.
- Negotiating joint ventures, acquisitions and take-overs.

Where using the customer's language can bring additional benefits:

- Establishing a positive rapport and sense of trust with major customers.
- Showing respect for cultural and religious differences.
- Demonstrating a long-term commitment to a foreign market.
- Showing your employees and foreign clients that 'you mean business'.
- Increasing the flow of market intelligence and customer feedback and understanding its real meaning.

Most businesses recognise the need to establish a rapport or sense of trust with their clients. In other words, the ability to create one-on-one relationships can be a vital ingredient in a successful business.

"Talking to customers in their own language leads to better communication and can prevent misunderstanding. It shows our customers and business partners that we foresee a long-term commitment to their market. Each partner is more confident in business meetings, and 'speaking the same language' can save time, allow for a more relaxed meeting and result in better business." (Nikwax Ltd, UK, PIMLICO Study)

What knowing foreign languages can do for you personally:

- Increase your self-esteem, confidence and self-reliance abroad.
- Enhance your personal job prospects.
- Demonstrate your respect for your trading partners.
- Improve your understanding of the business environment.

"An international survey of international recruiters found that nine out of ten executive recruiters believe that the ability to speak another language is critical to success in Europe, Asia-Pacific and Latin America. They believe that executives who are multilingual (i.e. speak more than two languages fluently) have a significant competitive advantage."
(Korn/Ferry survey, 2005) ([4])

1.3 English alone is not enough

Stating the obvious about English…

- English is the most studied foreign language in the world and is likely to peak at about two billion learners in the next decade.
- English is the dominant language of global trade.
- English proficiency is now seen by business as a generic skill much like computing skills or numeracy which people in international trade are assumed to possess.
- English is the preferred language for intra-company communications in many global companies, and increasingly in medium-sized ones as well as more and more cross-border mergers take place.
- Without basic English skills, your company will have difficulty trading across continents and even beyond neighbouring countries.
- The use of English is frequently disconnected from its cultural roots, for example, many non-native speakers of English use a simplified form called 'off-shore' or 'mid-Atlantic' English.

Proficiency in English is essential to expanding your international trade. However, not everyone speaks English, and more to the point, not everyone wants to speak English, for example, when receiving a sales pitch in one's home country. This idea is summarised in a quotation attributed to former German Chancellor Willy Brandt:

"If I am selling to you, then I will speak your language, aber wenn du mir etwas verkaufst, dann muβt du Deutsch sprechen" (…but if you want to sell me something, then you must speak German).

While English remains as important as ever on the Internet, other languages such as Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and Portuguese are becoming comparatively more important *(English Next, 2006)* ([5]).

The Confederation of Danish Industries carried out a survey ([6]) among their member companies in 2007 which showed that languages other than English are used by more than a third of all companies and that 4 out of 10 companies have experienced more or less serious communication problems with trade partners in other countries as a result of linguistic deficits.

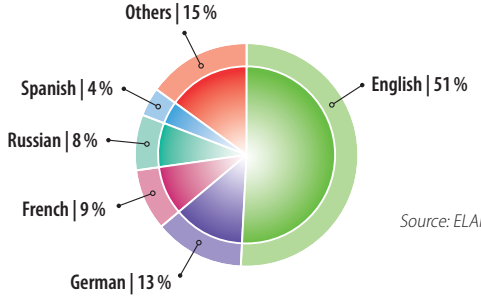
The Austrian *Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtshaft* published a report ([7]) in 2006 projecting future language needs in Austria. In addition to English, companies will need Italian and the languages of their trading partners in Central and Eastern Europe, in particular Czech, Slovak and Hungarian. In Eastern Europe, German and Russian are still used almost as often as English as international languages.

Many languages called for

Most European SMEs cite English as the primary language used for business communication in their major export markets, but there is widespread use of other languages as well.

- German is frequently used when exporting to 15 countries (including Germany and Austria).
- Russian is frequently used in trade with the Baltic States, Poland and Bulgaria.
- French is frequently used in 8 countries, including France, Belgium and Luxembourg.

Languages used by SMEs for exporting



Source: ELAN, 2006.



✚ The company *Golla Oy* (Finland), a manufacturer of sleeves and cases for mobile technologies, advocates the idea of total adaptation, i.e. using the language of their business partners whenever possible (as opposed to their own mother tongue or a third language). The company plans to develop in-house skills in Chinese and Portuguese within the next three years. Fluency in Chinese will give the company an added advantage in communication with its China-based production plants and knowledge of Portuguese will ease business communication with Brazil ([1]). ✚

There are other reasons that your language approach should be *multilingual*, rather than *English-only*:

- ✚ English suffices for first contacts with overseas clients, but to go deeper and make a medium-term investment, you'll need to know the local language and local customs.
- ✚ Japan and the emerging markets such as China and parts of South East Asia may be adopting English as their language for doing business with Europe, but will welcome business opportunities in their own languages.
- ✚ Trading in Latin America is almost impossible without a few words of Spanish or Portuguese.
- ✚ Travelling around Russia with only English is not for the faint-hearted!
- ✚ There is growing enthusiasm for the use of local or regional languages such as Catalan, Welsh, and Basque, which are increasingly accepted for use in everyday communication.

Chapter 2
What is a language management strategy?

A *language management strategy* is a company's package of measures and techniques used to prevent linguistic and cultural barriers from occurring in new and expanding foreign markets.

The strategy addresses specific communication issues relevant to the particular market. Many of these methods can be transferred to other markets. As companies enter new markets, they tend to adapt their strategy to new linguistic and cultural needs.

2.1 What does good language management look like?

What makes a company's language management strategy successful is the targeted combination of various elements.

Companies such as *Baest* develop their *language management strategy* by selecting from a range of various language measures:

- use of local agents to solve language problems;
- creation of specially culturally and/or linguistically adapted websites;
- use of linguistic audits;
- use of professional translators/interpreters;
- translation of promotional, sales and/or technical material;
- language training and cultural briefing schemes;
- online language learning;
- employee selection and recruitment policy;
- support for employee mobility, 'buddying' and secondment schemes;
- link-forging with local universities;
- foreign student placement programmes;
- native-speaker recruitment;
- e-commerce involving multilingual operations;
- product or packaging adaptation in line with local tastes and customs.



✚ *Baest*, a.s. is a private producer of welded steel frames and in Benešov, Central Bohemia (40 km from Prague). It has 240 employees and a turnover in excess of €30M; exports make up about 80 % of sales. It has experienced exponential growth since the fall of the Berlin Wall and its success is due in part to its language management strategy. Staff with the language skills required in German, French, Russian, U.S. and Ukrainian markets have been hired, and the company website has been translated into each of these languages. Staff can handle any situation in English, Russian, German or French. The company plans to expand into Slovakia and the UK. Through its excellent language skills, the company has never faced communication or cultural problems. In the past three years, *Baest* has undertaken training in four languages: English, German, French and Romanian. The company is aware that it needs additional expertise in French (for correspondence) and Polish (for negotiations), as well as additional knowledge about cultural differences in the UK, Germany and France ([1]). ✚

2.2 Impact of language management strategies on trade

Companies that invest in language management techniques are more likely to have higher export sales than those that don't.

If your company invests in four language measures, there's a strong likelihood that your exports will grow 50 % more than your competitors who don't.

Tip: These four language techniques are connected with higher export sales:

- Recruiting **native speakers** from your target markets.
- Appointing company **employees who already possess language skills**.
- Using professional **translators** and/or interpreters.
- Developing **a language plan or strategy** for handling communication barriers before you start exporting to a particular country.

The table below shows the impact of these techniques in increasing exports as a share of total SME sales.

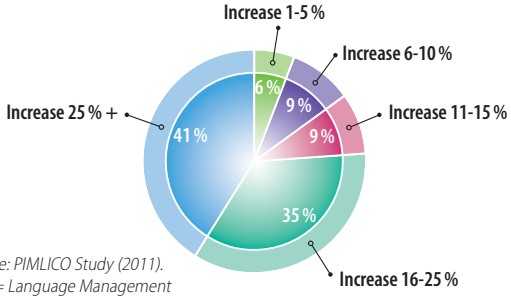
Language Measure	Percentage increase in exports as share of sales
Hiring staff with language skills	16.6
Establishing language strategy in advance	13.5
Employing native speakers	7.0
Using professional translators	7.4

Source: ELAN, 2006.

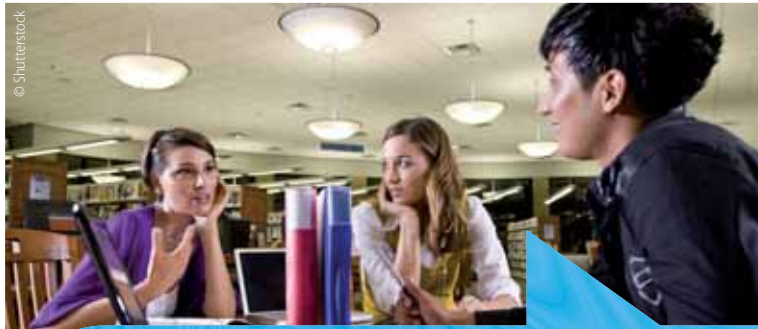
2.3 Facts and figures

In a survey ([1]) of 40 successful European small and medium-sized exporters who had introduced a language strategy, in 3 out of 4 of these companies, sales turnover increased by at least 16 % through language management.

Percentage Increase in Companies' (40 companies) Turnover Due to LMS Implementation



Source: PIMLICO Study (2011). LMS = Language Management Strategy



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✚ The Slovenian company *Bisol*, which specialises in the production of high-quality mono- and multicrystalline silicon photovoltaic modules, sees a direct correlation between its introduction of new languages as part of its strategy and a 35 %+ rise in sales turnover in the past business year:

'The company added Italian and French in the last business year and sales were directly affected' ([1]).

Entek, a manufacturer of polyethylene battery separators from Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, successfully uses its customer's languages in the company: English, Polish, German, Chinese, Russian, and Latvian. In their view:

'Customers come back to us with their orders because they know we speak their language. Polish customers in particular have responded positively to the use of Polish. As a courtesy, all order confirmations are sent back to customers in their native language: things may not be as well understood in English' ([1]). ✚

Common Language Techniques Used by the Top Ten Successful Export Companies

Language Management Techniques	IKO	Evricom	Filc	Golla Oy	Kart. Huber	Danfo	Nikwax	Steel-Press	Stendera	Tarmeko
1. Language training for staff	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚
2. Intercultural training for staff		✚	✚		✚		✚	✚	✚	✚
3. Recruiting staff with language skills	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚
4. Recruiting native speakers	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚
5. Recruiting local agents for language issues	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚
6. Employing professional translators/interpreters	✚	✚	✚		✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚
7. Buddying/secondment schemes	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚		✚	✚	✚	
8. Cooperation with universities		✚	✚		✚		✚	✚		
9. Multilingual websites (3+ languages)	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚
10. Cultural adaptation of websites	✚	✚	✚		✚	✚	✚	✚	✚	✚

Source: PIMLICO Study (2011).

2.4 It's all down to your people and your company's image abroad...

Your strategy comes down to two key features: management of **people** and **presentation of your company** to customers. Getting both of these right in your company's language management strategy will lay the foundation for successful international trade.

Some would argue that success depends only on the **price** and **quality of your product.** Of course, both are critical to your business, but success also depends on the quality of your communication. Without hiring and training the **right people** for the foreign market or focusing on how your company creates a positive perception of itself in the market place, even a superior price/quality ratio will not guarantee success in exporting.

The rest of this guide focuses on:

- **Your people:** how you select, train and manage the people you need for your international trade.
- **Your company's presentation and image to the customer:** how you market, promote, publicize and present your product or service in the marketplace.

Chapter 3
Developing your people

3.1 Language training: what can it do for your business?

Here are a few tips before you or your colleagues start to learn a language:

- **You may only need a few words.** Try to learn the basics for travelling and greeting people. It could save you a great deal of inconvenience and frustration when travelling, and help you feel independent, but it will also please your hosts.
- **Don't worry about gaining a perfect command of the language before you start speaking.** You don't have to be fluent to show you mean business. Still, you should always leave complex negotiations such as those involving legal and contractual issues to language professionals.

Important tips in setting your company's language training goals – training may be:

- Short-term and operational with limited objectives (e.g. skill-based telephone/receptionist training); or
- Long-term and strategic, i.e. training for 'stock', when you expect to be in a market long-term.

Specify to your trainer what language skills are needed for various jobs or tasks (i.e. job-specific skills, speaking or just understanding, basic or advanced knowledge, and so on).

Examples of methods:

- **Face-to-face:** generally this is classroom-based learning with a tutor, either on a 'crash' course, or on a regular weekly basis (i.e. a 'drip-feed' – four hours in two two-hour weekly sessions) which may be delivered in small groups or one-on-one.

- **Distance, open learning, or self-study:** generally there is no tutor: you either work entirely on your own using self-study materials or receive support for self-study. Usually organised through a university or college, you may receive telephone tuition once a day and/or upon payment of a subscription, you can drop in at a language centre at your local college or university to use their materials.
- **A combination of face-to-face and supported self-study:** this is the most comprehensive and effective learning package, provided that the two parts are integrated and geared to your needs.

The most common type of training is short-term and is intended to meet an immediate need for verbal communication.

Here are a few examples of how even a short language training course can help:

- Your company receives a sales lead from abroad which necessitates telephone calls, letters, or meetings in the customer's language.

Your options may include training in telephone-sales, word-processing, or on making short presentations in a foreign language, particularly if you already have people with some knowledge of the language.

- You are in the running for a large order in China; you must send over a technical expert and a training specialist who will need to be posted to the area for several months.

Here, your personnel will need to learn 'survival' Chinese, as well as cultural norms so as to avoid unnecessarily behaving in a disconcerting manner. It may help to learn key technical terms and the vocabulary for giving instructions.

- You have been receiving telephone enquiries from abroad about your new product (although you have only displayed it in your own country). In some cases, the overseas enquirers may have very poor English.

At a minimum, you might consider training your switchboard operator to distinguish various callers' languages (e.g. Chinese or Japanese), and providing training on key phrases, such as 'One moment, I'll put you through', or 'Sorry, Ms 'X' is out of the office today, please call back tomorrow.' Providing the phrases in phonetic form, for example on a mousemat, or developing a script can help your staff enormously.

3.2 Adapting language training to your needs

Language training does not suit every company: it involves time, effort and commitment on the part of your key staff. So before you start, you need to be clear about what language training can and cannot do for you!

- It cannot address all your company's communication needs.
- If you're starting a new language from scratch, it will demand a great deal of time, effort and personal commitment.
- Staff must still continue with their primary skills and duties unless you decide to invest in an immersion course in the language.

- Language skills are secondary skills and enable employees to enhance their effectiveness in international environments.
- A balance must be struck between developing these skills and the main objective of the organisation.
- Time and money may be wasted if training schemes are not relevant to your business.
- It is not generally designed to produce a level of skill which can replace the normal work of language professionals (i.e. translators and interpreters), but it will reduce your dependence.

"Unless the learner is exceptionally gifted, learning a new language at the business level will take several months full-time, a bit less if the course takes place in the country so that the learner is fully immersed."
(Cultures and Organisations, Software of the Mind, 2010) ([8])

Consider these other factors and discuss them with your training provider:
- Relevance of your training materials.
- Suitability of your learning methods.
- Visits to the country (and in-country learning).
- Training environment, number of fellow students and educational standards.
- Quality of training providers and background of trainers (native speaker or your own nationality?).
- Level of proficiency required to fulfil tasks.
- Qualifications and certificates available for staff undertaking these courses.
- Other available support such as Web-based programmes, software on DVDs, distance learning courses with tutors via telephone.

Tip: Is your training benchmarked to a set of common European standards?

The *Common European Framework* has been developed by the Council of Europe and provides a common basis for the development of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It comprehensively describes what language learners need to learn in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they must develop in order to act effectively. The description also covers a language's cultural context and the framework defines levels of proficiency at which learners' progress can be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis.
Source: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment ([9]).

Your company may not have the time or resources to train people in difficult languages, especially when the purpose is speculative. A language management strategy gives you many more options to consider and enables you to select the right package of measures for your company.

You will find more examples of these measures in section 3.4: Recruiting the Right People.

In conclusion, language training is an important option because speaking and understanding your customer's language can:
- Help you understand what makes your customer tick.
- Give you direct appreciation of your customer's lifestyle and culture.
- Increase your credibility, respect and goodwill in the eyes of the customer.

3.3 Developing cultural awareness in your company

What is meant by 'culture' in business?

Culture has been defined as *'a community of people united by similar rituals, values, heroes and symbols. It has a unifying effect and creates a sense of pride, belonging and familiarity.'* (Tony Fernandes, *Global Interface Design*) ([10])

When your business operates overseas, collaborates with people from abroad, and must carry out familiar tasks in unfamiliar circumstances, being a 'fish-out-of-water' can have a significant impact on the business, and getting it wrong can result in your losing the business altogether.

You need to be aware of cultural differences if you and your colleagues want to be as effective in dealing across cultural boundaries as you are on home territory. What's more, cultural awareness is not limited to your interpersonal relations, it is inherent in the style and design of your business processes, in the way you hold meetings, and in knowing when to speak and when to remain silent.

How you design your Web pages and packaging and use graphics or symbols, your choice of names, and even the date of the product launch can all be culturally sensitive.

The impact of cultural differences on your business

One distinguishing feature of top-performing companies is that cultural differences are not regarded as problematic but rather as enriching and stimulating. Understanding the culture of negotiations and the mindset of different cultures is for many an essential requirement to international business. Addressing cultural difference is arguably one of the most overlooked aspects of doing business internationally.

Cultural differences in practice

How to negotiate the following *cultural hot-spots* varies between cultures – and an inappropriate response could damage your business prospects:

- How you address people and in what order.
- How you relate to gender and age.
- How you relate to authority.
- Decision-making processes.
- Personal space.
- Material wealth.
- Management and purpose of meetings, etc.


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✚ *Evricom* of Bulgaria initially encountered communication problems in Albania, which led to the end a business partnership and a financial loss of nearly €50K. The company responded by employing local people with relevant language skills to do business in Albania. Its experience in France was similar: the company had also lost business over intercultural issues. In response, the company hired a Bulgarian residing in France who spoke fluent French.

The company has responded to these experiences with a comprehensive HR strategy: it now tracks staff language skills and can handle business situations competently in four foreign languages: English, German, Greek and Romanian. To overcome cultural barriers, for the past three years staff have received intercultural training dealing with France and Germany. Native speakers have been hired for the Romanian and Greek markets. Hiring native speakers has boosted company confidence in expansion and increased company capability. Its next market is Italy ([1]). ✚

Meeting etiquette varies greatly between countries. Issues such as punctuality, meeting attendance, and agenda topics can vary enormously. In some cultures, the purpose of a meeting is to discuss and debate an issue before arriving at a consensual decision, while in others it is simply to rubber stamp the boss's decision.

- A European manager who expects to reach a concrete agreement on his or her first trip to East Asia is almost guaranteed disappointment.
- Showing signs of impatience while sipping tea and waiting to talk business with a prospective buyer in the Middle East will do you no favours.
- Addressing your German host by their first name at a preliminary business meeting may provoke a negative reaction since informality normally takes many years.
- Business travellers should be aware of the respect given to business cards in many parts of Asia: the exchange of business cards is often a ceremony in itself.
- Business people who translate their business cards and job titles into the local language will be one step ahead of the competition.

Other sensitive areas are entertainment, socialising and gift-giving. The 'rules' of best practice naturally differ from country to country, but here are some of the questions to ask about the cultures you trade with:

- **Humour:** International managers should proceed with caution, but humour can be an engaging way to bridge cultural differences. Shared laughter is particularly meaningful on cross-cultural teams, where it can bring differences to the surface and contribute to team bonding. Is the culture one in which self-criticism, self-deprecating

humour, and jokes at one's own expense are appreciated and found funny or would this be considered bad taste?

- **Teasing:** In many Western business cultures, teasing is routinely used as a means of social control. Typically, it serves to chastise a latecomer to a meeting or to mark mild displeasure while avoiding confrontation. But in certain Asian cultures, making fun of someone may leave managers feeling uncomfortable. In Japan, managers use after-hours drinking as a functional equivalent to criticising with humour.
- **Entertainment:** Who pays for the lunch, the host or the salesperson? Will someone be offended if you insist on paying for their meal? How should you avoid escalation in the quality, lavishness and cost of entertainment? What are your business partners likely to enjoy doing in their spare time in your country? How should you dress for the evening social?
- **Gift-giving:** While in many parts of Asia gift-giving is a normal token of courtesy, in some Western cultures it may be seen in a very different light. At what stage of a meeting should you present the gift? How much should you spend on it? What would be appreciated? Where can you get good advice on these questions?
- **Greetings:** Australians and Americans prefer a strong handshake, the French use a lighter, single handshake, and the Japanese usually bow. How should you respond?

Mastering a language is often only half the battle: awareness of cultural differences can also be crucial. Shaking hands, blowing noses and making direct eye contact communicates different messages in different cultures. Business etiquette, meeting protocol, punctuality and socialising vary tremendously between countries.

Intercultural awareness, knowledge and skills training

Intercultural awareness, knowledge, and skills can be acquired. The starting point is an awareness of one's own culture and the end point is a recognition of the distinctions between two cultures and the ability to function effectively in a second culture. Intercultural skills help you communicate with people from other cultures with flexibility and sensitivity.
Source: Cultures and Organisations. Software of the Mind (2010).

"Respecting and understanding the customer's culture and mentality are the most emphasised points. Stendera also focuses on intercultural skills and keeps a record of the staff's intercultural skills. It has undertaken intercultural training in the following cultures over the past three years: Russian, Finnish, Japanese, Polish, Chinese, Egyptian, Slovenian, English, German and French." (Stenders, Latvia, PIMLICO Study)

There are two generally separate types of cultural training:

- Cultural briefings focusing on *knowledge* of the target country: its geography, major features and recent history.
- Awareness and skills training focusing on *process* rather than content. Learning how our own culture ticks so we can understand how another one ticks.

Tailor-made courses

Many consulting firms and training organisations offer culture-specific, tailor-made programmes designed to meet an organisation's needs, often run in-house or in a local conference centre. Courses often follow from a language review or training needs analysis where inter-cultural problems have come to light.

Depending on the aims of the programme (general awareness or enhanced individual effectiveness), the training format may range from twenty participants for a half-day course (very basic general awareness session) to six people for up to three days per target culture. Where the aim is general internationalisation, several cultures can be covered in two-day seminars, though clearly the learning remains at a fairly superficial level.

3.4 Recruiting the right people

Native speakers and language graduates

When asked which of his six languages he used for business, a Dutch businessman replied, *'I use whichever one gives me a commercial advantage!'* You may not have reached this level of language expertise yet, but why not consider hiring someone like him! Hiring a language graduate with 2-3 languages can make a real difference!

Most successful European companies have adopted good HR policies, including recruitment of the right kind of people: multi-skilled staff proficient in several languages. This makes good economic sense, since the


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✚ ***Kartographie Huber*, a top export performer based in Germany *(PIMLICO Study, 2011)*, recruits native speakers and provides language and cultural training to its employees, developing deeper intercultural understanding based on a respect for 'differentness'. The company uses professional translators and interpreters and its websites have a significant multilingual dimension and are culturally adapted. The company recognises and values its access to linguistic and cultural expertise and to foreign student populations of local universities.** ✚


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✚ *Nikwax* (UK) found a correlation between its employment of native speakers and its increasing trade volume in France, Austria, Germany, Poland and Switzerland. Employing native speakers clearly fulfils language needs in exporting while supporting labour mobility policies within the EU and the wider world ([1]). ✚

combined impact of hiring graduates with language skills and hiring native speakers to handle language and cultural issues is an export rate 23 % higher than in companies not adopting either measure. These exemplar companies have also adopted the good practice of keeping careful records of their staff's international profiles, including language ability, cultural competence, and international experience and background so they can talent-spot and move people with the right skills quickly into international positions *(ELAN Study, 2006).*

On average, more than one in five European export firms employ native speakers full time in support of their foreign trade, demonstrating a recognition by European companies that this is an important element of an international communication strategy.

Linking to universities

Many European companies make special use of universities by hiring language graduates and placing foreign students within their companies. Foreign students are able to help open up new markets by handling the phone calls and providing an easy interface with clients from their own countries.

Kartographie Huber, for example, works with universities for their expertise in language audits. It works with the Universities of Munich, Augsburg, Chur and Eichstätt, Pristina, Kuwait and Bahrain. Its unique innovation is the geographic diversity of these international universities which are selected for their relevance to the company's markets ([1]).

Many foreign students and interns carry out business placements abroad as part of their course. This may provide you with a way to test your export plan without committing to a permanent employee. Success is not guaranteed, but the student can develop some prospects and make initial contacts without breaking the bank!

For example, bringing in a foreign student from your target market may help you to:

- set up a foreign invoicing system.
- access local market information and make new business contacts in the market.
- develop a positive attitude among your own staff to the idea of working alongside nationals from other countries on international teams.
- introduce new language skills, knowledge of ways of doing business, fresh ideas, enthusiasm and motivation.

Who knows, you may later decide to employ the person full-time!

Tips:

- Contact your local university or business school for more information.
- Talk to your local chamber and other business organisations for possible leads.

3.5 Using local agents for your language needs

Using local agents who speak your own language can be the first step in opening up a new and sometimes unknown market. On average, three in ten export SMEs use local agents and/or distributors who speak the language of the company. France and Germany lead the way in their widespread use of French-speaking and German-speaking local agents.

For smaller companies that seek to enter new markets but lack the resources for recruiting native speakers or language graduates, using local agents is a common practice.

‘Without a local agent, no sales could have been made in Saudi Arabia and the same is true for France.’
(Bitmedia E-learning solutions, Austria, PIMLICO Study)

In conclusion, native speakers and/or local agents can help you check the linguistic and cultural appropriateness of:

- your sales literature;
- your publicity campaigns;
- your promotional literature;
- your business cards;
- your pricing policy;
- your compliance with local regulations;
- your website and all relevant webpages;
- your correspondence;
- your telephone operators’ response to incoming calls in their language;


© iStockphoto

✚ *Spectrum Technologies*, an aerospace engineering company, has recruited a significant number of sales partners (or agents) in its key markets, who were chosen for their local market knowledge, contacts, previous customers and other partners/suppliers. This has grown to 22 agents covering 27 countries. In some cases local staff were also recruited and employed by *Spectrum* – usually in locations where competition was fierce and service levels had to be guaranteed, or where it was discovered that it was financially more advantageous to employ rather than contract staff. The company has six field staff or branch offices – one in Hong Kong (branch), two in China (branch in Shanghai, engineer in Beijing), one in Mexico, one in Italy and one in India. Generally reps are used in countries where there is little English spoken and where for cultural or linguistic reasons it is easier to do business in the local language, as is the case in Japan and the Far East, Russia, and South America ([1]). ✚

- your representatives' expenses in the foreign country – receipts, etc.;
- your general translations into their language (for style, accuracy etc.);
- your outgoing emails and messages in the customer's language.

They can also help with:

- preparing your staff and their families for a secondment abroad;
- language training;
- cultural briefing;
- cultural awareness and skills training;
- recruitment of new staff and testing of language competence via interview;
- non-specialist translation;
- non-specialist interpreting;
- meeting and greeting your foreign clients;
- preparing briefings for your visitors in their own language.

Chapter 4
Presenting your company's best image

Top-quality incoming and outgoing international communication can be a very powerful tool which if handled efficiently will enhance your overseas markets and your business performance. But if handled poorly through mistranslation or misinterpretation, not only can your image be undermined, it can cost you dearly!

A vital part of your language management strategy is ensuring the quality of your external information flow and the impact on your client. Specifically, this means:

- High-quality translation and localisation.
- Designing and culturally adapting your multilingual website and advertising material.
- Adequate interpretation.

4.1 Why do you need high-quality translation?

There are many sound, practical reasons:

- Accurate and timely translation of all outgoing commercial and technical information to your customers will give you a strong competitive edge.
- Your business should aim to appear 'local' in all customer-oriented materials. If it doesn't, your competitors' information will.
- Your credibility and the level of respect from your foreign customers and buyers are a reflection of the quality of your written and verbal communications with them.

Tip: Your company is likely to need technical input into its product and service descriptions. Specifications will need to be adapted: in certain markets such as Germany or parts of Scandinavia, more detailed

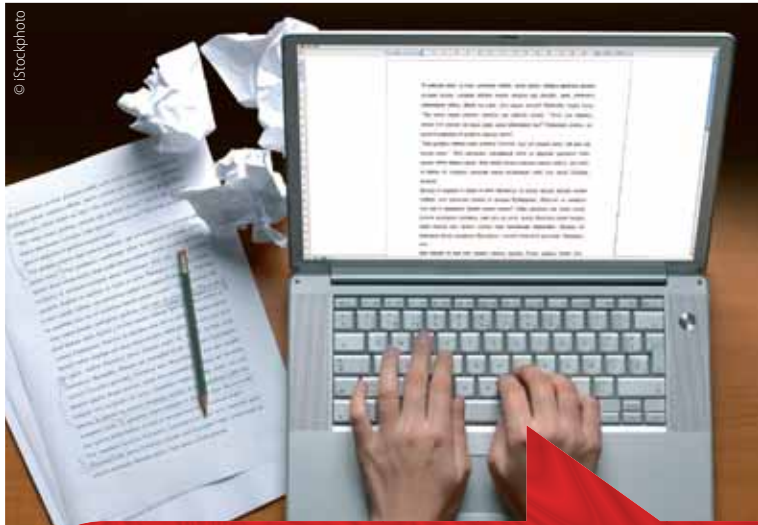
technical specifications are required than in many other parts of Europe. This will also change the content of your product literature, for example, your product literature for the USA and China will need to adhere to different sets of norms, regulations and standards. So bear these cultural and legal considerations in mind before having your domestic product literature translated literally.

Where translations can go wrong

One company produced their technical specification and sales literature in several languages only to find they were claiming exceptional efficiency for their 'watery sheep' (i.e., 'hydraulic rams'). In French there are four different words for 'valve', while an English 'bolt' can variously be translated into German as a 'Bolzen', 'Schraube', or 'Stift', depending on its function. False friends have tripped up many an amateur linguist: 'Stickstoff' in German is not glue, but nitrogen. It also took a British supplier some time to work out that a French company asking for a supply of 'sunflower paper' ('papier de tournesol') was seeking 'litmus paper'! *(Improving your business communications, 2001)* ([11])

Some things to consider before outsourcing translation

- Most companies tend to use either freelance translators, translation companies or agencies. Some companies and agencies specialise in particular business sectors or particular types of translation. These specialist translation companies often maintain their own database of the terminology used in your sector.



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✚ ***IKO Sales International*** **uses only native-speaker translators with specialist knowledge of the local terminology.** ***'We ask our local clients and distributors about the quality of our brochures and language. This increases the quality of the texts and lets local distributors involved with the company know that we care about their language.' IKO*** **invests in uniformity and recognisability. The symbols used are examined from the perspective of each culture and checked for nuances which if incorrectly translated could detract from the company's image. Poor translations give an unprofessional impression, even if the company itself is highly professional ([1]).** ✚

- The best professional translators are those able to get to know your company culture, specialise in your sector, and learn about your products, and are prepared to establish a lasting working relationship.
- Translators usually charge either by the number of words or the number of lines, and the shorter the notice, the greater the cost is likely to be! If you use translators with a database of your terminology, it should be less expensive for you than if they were starting from scratch.

4.2 Can technology assist?

The quick answer is 'yes', provided you understand the limitations.

Limitations on the use of translation technology

- **Accessibility:** You may find you need hi-spec systems and plenty of RAM to run certain programs. Certain machine-assisted translation systems operate with a data bank of your company's (or sector's) specific terms if you want to attempt anything other than the simple and straightforward. It may take many years of inputting the terminology to achieve anything near perfection!
- **Human support:** Other than the simplest gadgets, most language technology requires a professional language specialist to start you off and monitor how you use and develop these tools and programs. Documents translated by a machine will almost certainly need checking ('post-editing') by a professional translator. Sometimes the cost of the post-editing can be as great as the complete translation carried out by a translator from scratch!

Here are some examples of translation tools:

- **Machine-assisted translation (MAT) systems:** For an automatic, 'approximate' translation of your written material. Now available in code form on the Web with search engines. MT Systems are particularly good for translating predictable content and style such as parts lists, technical manuals, patent applications and so on. The first output must be checked by an expert.
- **Business letter generators:** For producing foreign language versions of standard business letters where you can either select what you want to say from a range of pre-set paragraphs and phrases, or develop your own model letters from templates to be churned out in different languages as an automatic response to business opportunities. The final version may still need to be checked by a linguist.
- **Hand-held translation scanners**, which can recognise about half a million words.
- **Multilingual Web-browsers.**
- **Online terminology databases:** One of the most comprehensive terminology bases which is publicly available is IATE ([12]), the multilingual terminology search engine used by the translation services of the EU institutions.
- **Multilingual document management systems** which support document generators across different languages. So if, for example, you update your engine manual for German or English, the revision is simultaneously applied to the same document in other languages.

4.3 Advertising abroad

Foreign language publicity and advertising is aimed at producing written text in a foreign language, but includes several stages of cultural adaptation and is a distinctly different area than translation.

Foreign publicity and advertising cater for your need to convey information and messages to your foreign clients or users of your products or services. The accuracy and cultural sensitivity of these statements is often the *most permanent* impression that your organisation will leave with clients or end users.

Translation of advertising and sales literature is risky, as poor translations can damage your image abroad. Colloquial sayings, glosses, puns, one-liners, catchy phrases and other clever plays on words can rarely be translated literally. Finding the right turn of phrase in a foreign language to express your product's qualities can be difficult and time-consuming. Good translations of your publicity materials are vital to promoting the right image abroad. And regrettably it is in this area that much lasting damage can be done:

- **The style of the language** used in product descriptions can vary greatly between cultures. For example, some cultures have a tendency to exaggerate, claiming the product is 'the best', 'the greatest', 'the most attractive', etc. Other cultures prefer detailed technical or factual descriptions, where quality and performance speak for themselves.
- **Product names, brands and slogans** may not translate well into your client's language.
- **Humour** is commonly used in U.S. advertising, but can be seen as poor taste in other cultures. Laughing at oneself and self-irony, for example, is unacceptable in a number of countries.

Once the objectives have been defined, remember that the production of foreign language texts intended for your customers is *never* simply a translation process.

Ensure that the version you commission is culturally adapted. Plan to employ an in-country PR consultant as well as a professional translator and check the impact of your publicity materials on potential clients within the particular country.

Quick Check: Have you made sure that your display materials, product descriptions, brochures and pamphlets are in the local language and that your sales and reception staff have been trained to speak directly with customers in their language. You should ensure that the choice of words, text, symbols, colours and graphics in your advertising materials is not misleading in the local culture.

4.4 The importance of your multilingual company website

The Web has already made it easier for SMEs of all sizes to overcome certain barriers to internationalisation. Looking broadly across the European SME sector, 65 % of all SMEs in the IES report having their own website. The figure ranges from 63 % for micro enterprises to 80 % for small enterprises and 90 % for medium-sized enterprises. Adaptation of websites into the customer's local language and culture was found

frequently in the ELAN study, with over 50 % of businesses in 22 countries having websites in languages other than their national language, 60 % of which used English.

All the exemplar European export companies have invested in multilingual websites: the range of languages depends on the market size and attitudes towards English.

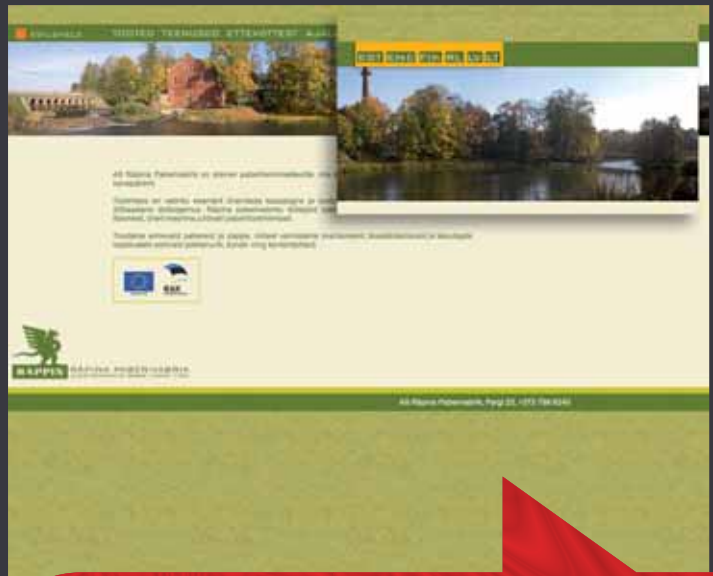
"Where the website exists in the native language, there are better sales, better brand recognition, and better and easier communication."
(Bisol, Slovenia, PIMLICO Study)

Is your company using its website to its full potential?

- Most websites are used for spreading general information on the company.
- Fewer European SMEs use their website for e-commerce: 28 % can receive orders on line and 14 % are able to complete the entire transaction, including payments, on line *(IES Study, 2010)*.
- E-commerce activity is positively correlated with high productivity in export and import markets.

One reason for the relatively low penetration of international e-commerce is the complexity of design: it is not as easy as it first appears to develop a graphic interface that is truly culturally adapted.

Tip: If e-commerce is an option for your company, check out companies with expertise in creating local interfaces for international websites. Look for good examples on the Web and try to do better!



✚ *Rapina Paberivabrik* (Estonia) translated its website into six languages: Russian, English, Latvian, Finnish, Lithuanian and Romanian. The company measured the impact of using local languages on its website and found a 16-25 % increase in sales on the adapted websites ([1]). ✚

4.5 Interpreting

Interpretation is the verbal translation of different languages for meetings and conferences.

Your choice of interpreter will depend upon your requirements:

- **Ad hoc or liaison interpreting.** Your business may need an interpreter to provide assistance communicating with your foreign clients and visitors. Common situations include company visits or business conversations, often in informal situations with small groups of participants.
- **Interpreted conference calls, via SKYPE or in-house telephone facilities.** This practice is gaining importance as an excellent way of reducing travel costs.
- **Conference interpreting.** This involves hiring the élite of the interpreting profession. Fortunately, you can contract with a company that will manage the conference facilities and supply professional interpreters.
- **Consecutive interpreting.** Interpreters are seated beside the speaker and interpret what the speaker says, usually after he or she has finished. This normally involves larger groups of people and more formal situations, and can be a complex task.
- **Whispered interpreting.** Commonly used for discreet interpretation when a small group listens to a speaker. The interpreter quietly 'whispers' to those requiring translation.

Tips:

- Once you select a professional interpreter, please give as much advance notice as possible and provide a briefing or background information to allow for preparation for the event. Interpreters are frequently left in the dark on the content or topic of the activity they will need to interpret. Furthermore, hiring a good interpreter should not be left to the last minute.
- To get the best out of your interpreter, involve them in the planning, respect their skills, and facilitate their task. Interpreters are not machines! They should be treated as valued team members, however temporary.

Chapter 5
How well are you doing?

5.1 Checklist for a good language management strategy

- Phone calls, emails, faxes, and letters received in a foreign language are dealt with promptly, or referred to someone trained to respond accurately and quickly.
- Your employees can prioritise foreign language communications as urgent or non-urgent.
- Professional translators are brought in as needed to check all contracts.
- You employ foreign nationals, hire foreign students on placement, and use local agents for language matters.
- Language and cultural awareness training are offered regularly in your company and intensive training is provided to prepare for foreign tradeshows, employees sent on secondment, arrival of foreign employees, etc.
- Potential linguistic and cultural barriers are spotted and addressed early in the planning stage and again during the work process.
- Linguistic and cultural aspects are handled competently from the point of first contact – the sales lead or initial joint venture approach – through to product development, packaging, delivery, and after-sales service.
- Your website is culturally adapted and customers can effortlessly find what they need and sense that they are respected as they peruse its content.

5.2 Check out how well you're doing with this quiz

Answer ten questions about language use in your company and find out how you can do more!

1. In how many foreign languages can your company operate?

(1) 1.
(2) 2.
(3) 3 to 5.
(4) More than 5.

Key: Successful companies are able to operate across a wide range of languages and cultural boundaries. Different languages are used singly or in parallel in different markets. When a language is not available, you have a system for identifying alternatives. You are aware that certain languages may be locally understood, but are not readily used for historical reasons. Most employees in your company can speak English at an advanced level.

2. Do you use professional translators/interpreters?

(4) Yes, regularly, for translating sales materials, legal documents and technical literature, and for interpreting during business meetings and negotiations.
(3) Yes, but not very often.
(2) Yes, but only in exceptional circumstances.
(1) No, we can deal with everything ourselves.

Key: To gain a competitive advantage, your business should aim to appear 'local' in all its customer-oriented materials. Accurate and timely translation/interpretation will give you credibility and respect from your foreign customers and buyers.

3. When do you organise language and/or cultural training for your staff?

(1) Never, we rely on our employees' skills.
(2) When someone specifically asks for it.
(3) Before entering a new market.
(4) On a regular basis.

Key: Language training makes a clear statement to your clients – it says, 'We are interested in you and are committed to working with you now and in the future'. For the client, a few words in their own language can make all the difference in their perception of your company. It also makes a statement to your workforce – it says: 'Communicating with clients in their own language is very important. But we also believe in your personal development'.

4. Is your website multilingual?

(4) Yes, it has been translated into our main business languages and culturally adapted to local markets.
(3) Yes, it has been translated into our main business languages.
(2) Yes, but only parts of it have been translated.
(1) No/we don't have a website.

Key: A *multilingual dimension* to your website is critical nowadays if you seek to win business. It is your marketing tool and for a small amount of money, it will allow you to speak directly to your customers in their language. But your website must also be *culturally adapted*. It makes no sense if the language works, but the colours, style and shape are in some way offensive, or appear 'foreign', like a bad translation.

5. Are language technologies such as online dictionaries available to your staff?

(4) Yes, staff access and often use language technologies such as online dictionaries, terminology databases, etc.
(2) Yes, staff access to language technologies but rarely use them/do not know how to use them.
(1) No, we do not use such tools.
(1) No, we are not aware of the existence of such tools.

Key: Language technologies constitute a first step in your company's ability to perform across a wide range of languages. Online databases such as IATE are useful and easily accessible tools.

6. What proportion of your staff speaks at least one foreign language?

(1) Less than 10 %.
(2) 10-24 %.
(3) 25-50 %.
(4) More than 50 %.

Key: Most top-performers follow good HR practice when it comes to using languages: they keep careful records of their staff's language and cultural skills and profile their international background, ethnicity, knowledge and experience of other languages and cultures so they can be placed where they have local knowledge.

7. When hiring people with language skills...

(3) We recruit native speakers of our clients' languages.
(2) We take on foreign students on placement.
(2) We recruit people who are non-natives but can speak foreign languages.
(4) We combine several of these measures.
(1) We do not specifically consider language skills when hiring.

Key: Successful companies consciously employ *native speakers of their clients' languages* who can offer language and cultural training to their employees and who can facilitate the development of language skills and deeper intercultural awareness and respect for other cultures amongst their colleagues. If you can't easily find native speakers suitable for your company, why not try recruiting foreign language graduates or foreign students on placement?

8. Before entering a new market in a foreign country...

(3) We hire a local agent or distributor to handle language and cultural issues.
(4) We hire a native speaker or someone who is fluent and is acquainted with the local culture.

(2) We organise specific training for our staff.
(1) We translate and adapt our website and documentation.
(4) We combine several of these actions.

Key: When entering a new market in which your company has inadequate local language competence, it is good practice to use local agents for your language tasks. Many companies say there is a clear link between the use of local agents for language matters and increased trade volume.

9. Have you already partnered with local universities to help you with language and cultural issues?

(4) Yes, we regularly bring in foreign students from our target markets or hire graduates with good language skills.
(3) Yes, we sometimes take on foreign students or students with good language skills on placement.
(2) Yes, but on rare occasions.
(1) Never.

Key: Successful companies have found many ways of partnering with universities to help with linguistic and cultural issues. Arrangements can be made for foreign students who are native speakers of clients' languages to take placements in your company and assist with language issues ranging from answering telephones to serving as tour guides for visitors.

10. How prepared is your company to face language and cultural barriers?

(4) We spot potential barriers early in the planning stage and take measures such as staff training, analysis of the culture's impact on business, etc. to prevent them from occurring.
(4) We keep a record of our staff's intercultural skills so they can be placed where they have local knowledge.
(2) We learn as we go and respond quickly when problems arise.
(1) We have never faced linguistic or cultural barriers so we don't spend resources on them.

Key: About one in five companies face cultural or linguistic challenges in their businesses. What is your company's response to a cultural or linguistic barrier? If you respond with interest and follow up with a short training course in cultural awareness or a language course, possibly by a native of that culture or language, then your company demonstrates that it values and seeks understanding of the other culture or language and hopes to 'get inside' your clients' mindset.

Check out your score:

- **If you scored between 36 and 40** – Excellent! You have an exceptional *language management strategy* and your export sales should be at least 50 % higher than your competitors. Well done! Your company is in a strong position to trade across continents. Look back at the few questions where you didn't score highest: can you adopt these measures, too?
- **If you scored between 26 and 35** – Very good! The measures you have already adopted will be having a significant impact on your trade. You should be performing at least 25 % ahead of your nearest competitors in exports. Your company is already solidly positioned to trade across language boundaries, but there are additional measures you can now adopt that will improve your prospects even further. Try to implement the measures in which you did not receive a high score and set a timetable for including them in your language management strategy.
- **If you scored between 16 and 25** – Good! You have recognised the value of adopting language measures, which will already be helping to increase your export sales. There is much more your company can still do to grow your trade in certain foreign markets where there are linguistic and cultural barriers. Look carefully at the questions in which you did not receive a high score. Are there any easy wins? Can you adopt any of these measures without too much difficulty? Plan which measures you can adopt and when.
- **If you scored between 10 and 15** – You are at an early stage in developing a *language management strategy* for your company. This guide contains many examples to help you develop a strategy which will result in a new level of export sales for your company. Think of measures your company could easily introduce in the next few months. If you haven't yet prepared a plan or language management strategy, why not start by checking in this guide for what other export companies are doing.

Useful contacts, references and sources of further information

Ireland

- Irish Chamber of Commerce | www.chambers.ie
  Bilateral chambers exist for the following countries, among others: Germany, Argentina, France, Greece, Arab Emirates, Portugal and Poland.
- City & County Enterprise Boards | www.enterpriseboards.ie
- Enterprise Ireland | www.enterprise-ireland.com
- Irish Exporters Association | www.irishexporters.ie
- Irish Small & Medium Enterprises Association | www.isme.ie
- Small Firms Association | www.sfa.ie

United Kingdom

- UK Trade and Investment | www.ukti.gov.uk
- British Chamber of Commerce | www.britishchambers.org.uk
  Bilateral chambers exist for the following countries, among others: Norway, Spain, France, Germany, Brazil, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey.
- National Centre for Languages (CILT) | www.cilt.org.uk

Malta

- Malta Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise | www.maltachamber.org.mt
  Bilateral chambers exist for the following countries, among others: France, Libya and the Arab Emirates.
- Malta Enterprise (Head office) | www.maltaenterprise.com
- Malta Chamber for small and medium sized enterprises (GRTU) | http://grtu.net

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European Commission

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'Languages mean business' is an initiative from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture. The objective is to promote greater use of foreign languages by small and medium-sized companies by raising awareness about how language strategies can significantly improve crossborder trade opportunities.

For more information, such as recent study results, success stories, an online quiz and support services, visit our website:
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