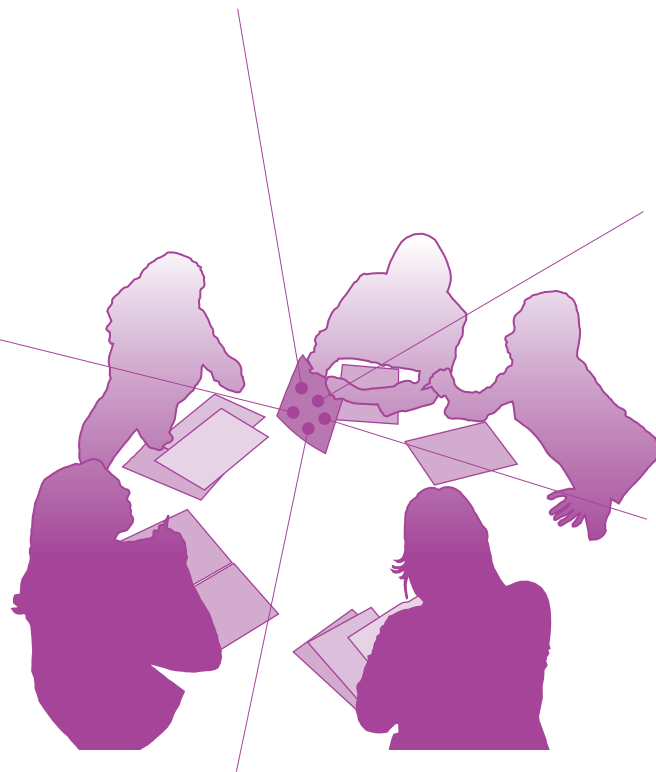
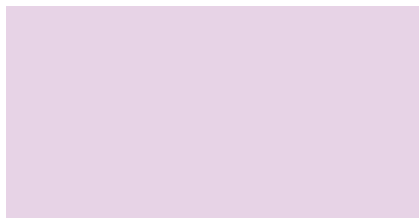


International Communications

A guide to successful planning



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Introduction

One in five companies is losing business because of language and cultural barriers, according to surveys by CILT, the National Centre for Languages. It is vital for international businesses to address these obstacles to success. This can be achieved by establishing a comprehensive international communication plan.

The development of such a plan should be an integral part of normal business planning for companies that have an international dimension. This is particularly relevant for exporters, for companies in the tourism and hospitality sectors and many other industries.

This booklet will take you through elements of this plan which you can integrate into your business's activity, and clearly signposts publications, websites and organisations which can help you in the final section, **Where to go next?** These resources are also highlighted in **bold** in the text.

What is an international communication plan?

An international communication plan is a series of measures which enables successful communication with foreign customers. Successful communication is not limited to verbal expression. Body language is also an important element of the way we communicate with others. It varies from culture to culture, in the same way that business and social etiquette vary.

Therefore a successful plan involves:

- mapping involvement in overseas markets against availability of relevant language and cultural skills in the workforce;
- developing cultural awareness of specific foreign markets;
- acquiring and making use of language skills at various levels, and developing these skills further;
- engaging professional translators to translate company marketing materials, important documentation, and undertake localisation of the website;
- engaging professional interpreters to interpret at business meetings.

It is also important that employees are aware of the importance of developing an international communication plan in order to enhance the company's performance in international business.

Review of international communication needs and capability

An important first step is to assess the language capability of your workforce by finding out whether any members of staff already have language skills that can be used for specific purposes. Even dormant language skills can be quickly developed and focused for business use.

In turn, look at the markets that your business is involved in - consider how language and cultural skills in your workforce could already be used to improve your communication with international customers.

You should also begin to see where there are skills gaps and therefore room for improvement. The following headings will help you to address this.

For subsidised support in this review process, you can arrange for an **Export Communications Review**, supported by **UK Trade and Investment** and the British Chambers of Commerce.

The benefits of cultural awareness in business

Cultural and intercultural awareness of specific international markets is vital. It will give you relevant information on business etiquette as well as a good understanding of the people you may encounter when conducting business in those markets. Intercultural skills will equip you to work effectively in multilingual and multicultural teams. It can make all the difference in a whole range of business transactions.

Knowledge of other cultures can be acquired through reading matter on specific markets, through research via the Internet and visiting sites of relevant embassies, for example. **UK Trade and Investment** provides briefings for markets all over the world.

An in-depth cultural knowledge of specific markets can also be acquired through cultural briefing sessions, delivered by specialised consultants. Cultural briefing sessions may vary between 3 hours (half a day), 6 hours (1 day) or 12 hours (2 days), according to need. Sessions are especially recommended for staff who travel overseas for business purposes, for example to attend conferences or secure new business, or those otherwise in regular and direct contact with overseas customers.

When approaching the Chinese market, Liverpool Water Witch addressed their need to understand this market and avoid cultural barriers. A series of cultural briefing sessions were organised to fully prepare the company's director, Joe Caddick, for the vastly different business environment in China.

"It's one thing presenting nice brochures," says Joe, "but it's quite another understanding the philosophy and etiquette of that country. First impressions count in business - and that couldn't be more relevant in China, where subtleties in behaviour can make or break a business relationship."

A cultural briefing session will be targeted to a specific market and should include general information about the culture in question, specific aspects on that culture's business etiquette, and dos and don'ts. The wider the gap between British culture and the target culture, the more comprehensive the cultural briefing session will need to be.

Cultural and intercultural briefing consultants can be found on **BLIS Professionals**.

The benefits of language skills in business

Language skills in a company are vital when dealing directly with foreign customers and other business contacts. Even the most basic language skills will help to greet potential customers and break the ice.

If your business activity involves regular direct communication with your overseas customers, through overseas visits, telephone contact, fax, email or letter, your company's linguistic ability can be improved in two ways.

1. Tailor-made language training for key members of staff

This will vary according to current ability levels, which can be categorised broadly:

- absolute beginners;
- people with dormant or basic language skills;
- people with a good general knowledge of the language, but who need to develop skills specific to their job (e.g. jargon; business language, etc.).

Your business needs will dictate the level of language skills needed. Language skills may be useful to a variety of staff in a variety of roles. For example, it may be useful for front-of-house staff to develop relevant language skills in order to greet visitors in one or more foreign languages; telephone switchboard operators may need to learn to greet callers, to ask callers to hold or to inform them that the person they wish to speak to is unavailable. Language skills are particularly useful for those who engage international customers and suppliers directly.

The International Sales Manager at paper manufacturer Slater Harrison had studied French in his school years. Now overseeing export sales to over 70 countries he decided to revive his French language skills. Based on speaking, listening and writing, the tailored course covered practical examples like evaluating websites and conducting meetings. “I’ve received many positive comments from my French-speaking contacts,” says Keith Hewitt. “I’m developing better relationships with customers and getting the edge over my competitors. I’d encourage as many people as possible to learn languages.”

2. Employing staff with relevant language skills

- Languages graduates and graduates with language skills;
- Native speakers of languages other than English;
- Other individuals with some degree of language ability.

Employing graduates with language skills will help increase the language ability of your company. Many graduates have skills in other subjects in addition to their language skills. The combination of these will be an asset to your company. Many local universities are interested in developing solid relationships with industry and are often interested in placing graduates with a variety of skills in combination with languages.

Alternatively, you can take on native speakers of the language you need. There is clear benefit here in terms of mother tongue fluency and cultural understanding. They must have very good English however to operate in most UK office environments.

There are many other people who may not have studied languages at university and who can offer relevant language skills to business. They may have an appropriate level, from basic to advanced. They may have acquired these skills while living abroad, while in school, in their community, at college or in a previous job role.

In all cases, it is important to recruit staff with a balance of languages and work experience, or consider training needs where one or the other is lacking. Employers have found that it is often easier to take on staff with language skills and enable them to gain commercial experience in the job or through training, rather than train language skills from scratch, which can be a long process. **BLIS Jobs**, the job site for people with languages, is supported by **CILT, the National Centre for Languages** and its **Regional Language Networks**. It can help you to find multilingual people at no cost.

Recruiting people with language skills paid dividends for international food exporters, Inter Europe Foods. The only two multilingual staff in the company were becoming increasingly busy. As a result three new French and Spanish speaking people were appointed - and the benefits were soon clear. “The feedback from customers has been fantastic,” says Sonya Jessop. “We’ve noticed a definite increase in enquiries and I’m convinced this is because we offer dedicated sales people who can communicate fluently in the customer’s language. We’ve managed to earn their trust, respect and, ultimately, business.”

The benefits of translation services in business

Translation deals with the written word. Professional translators possess a very high level of skill in the languages they work in, but they also need to be knowledgeable in the business context they are translating in, e.g. engineering, telecommunications, accounting.

Professional translators can be engaged for the translation of sales and promotional literature, operation manuals, correspondence, contracts etc.

International music publishers Music Exchange Ltd commissioned a revised translation of their suite of banking documents, including account requisition forms and pro forma invoices, after overseas customers noticed inaccuracies. Export Sales Executive, David Selway, says "As far as we're concerned, every single detail counts when you're trying to win international business - and accurately translated invoices and bank forms are just as important as glossy brochures. The reaction from our regular customers was extremely positive when we implemented the new documents - it's something that could only have helped to raise our image as a globally competent player."

For further information on commissioning translation services, read **Translation, Getting it Right**

The benefits of website translation and localisation

The translation and the localisation of your website - localisation means attuning it to cultural expectations - will help you promote your services more successfully in overseas markets. The choice of languages will depend on the markets you are targeting.

For further information on how to commission appropriate website localisation services, read our booklet on **Website Localisation**.

The benefits of interpreting services in business

Interpreting deals with the spoken word. Like translation, it is a highly specialised field and it requires specific expertise, both in terms of language skills and industry knowledge.

Translation and interpreting require very different professional skills. As such, a good translator may not be a good interpreter, and vice-versa.

Professional interpreters should be engaged to interpret at business meetings between two or more parties at multilingual conferences and at international fairs.

For further information on how to commission interpreting services for business, please read our publications on **Business Interpreting** and **Conference Interpreting**.

For an Engineering Company in Rochdale the services of a professional interpreter meant the ability to communicate effectively with an engineer from a major client in Brazil. This client had placed an order totalling hundreds of thousands of pounds, but with the requirement that one of their senior engineers would visit the manufacturer and personally verify the equipment and sign it off for delivery. The Brazilian visitor, whose English language skills were intermediate, struggled to understand local accents and therefore was unable to communicate with his suppliers during his visit. Dialogue was resumed when an interpreter was engaged and the visiting engineer was able to sign off the order.

Where to go next

BLIS Jobs The job site for people with languages. Free to use for both employers and jobseekers, maintained by CILT, the National Centre for Languages and promoted by its Regional Language Networks. www.blis.org.uk/jobs

BLIS Professionals Quality-assured on-line database of language trainers, translators, interpreters and cultural briefing consultants, maintained by CILT, the National Centre for Languages and promoted by its Regional Language Networks. www.blis.org.uk/professionals

Export Communication Review An export communications review provides companies with impartial and objective advice on addressing language and cultural barriers in overseas trade. www.chamberonline.co.uk/exportzone

Institute of Translation and Interpreting Independent professional association of practicing translators and interpreters in the United Kingdom. www.iti.org.uk

Institute of Linguists The Institute of Linguists serves the interests of professional linguists throughout the world and acts as a respected languages assessment and accredited awarding body. www.iol.org.uk

UK Trade and Investment For cultural information and advice on overseas markets. www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk

Publications in this series:

Business Interpreting
Conference Interpreting
How to work with British Sign Language/English interpreters
Interpreting for the Public Services
Language Training
Website Localisation

Also available:

Translation, Getting it Right
(published by the Institute of Linguists)

All publications are available from:

Regional Language Networks
www.cilt.org.uk/rln

CILT, the National Centre for Languages
www.cilt.org.uk