

Language skills are crucial for growth and jobs.

Language skills are crucial for growth and jobs. Each year, thousands of European companies lose business and miss out on contracts as a result of their lack of language skills and intercultural competence. Large multinational firms have resources which give them the option to invest in language training and encourage staff mobility. Integrating different organisational cultures and communicating efficiently can nevertheless turn out to be real challenges. And what about small companies and entrepreneurs? Are there shortcuts to better multilingual communication? How can family run businesses reach out to new customers abroad? How can innovative startup companies make better strategic use of language skills?

USEFUL SOURCES

- http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/index_en.htm
EU language policy in general
- http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/index_en.php
EU's Lifelong learning programme
- http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/doc1063_en.htm
Erasmus: Student placements in companies
- <http://www.adam-europe.eu/adam/homepageView.htm>
Leonardo da Vinci: Funded projects from 2007
- <http://ec.europa.eu/eures/>
The European job exchange
- http://www.euro-paths.net/en/index_en.html
Language learning in European job placements and mobility programmes
- <http://www.etender.info/>
How to manage e-tenders
- <http://languageadvantage.com/>
The value-added of languages for companies
- <http://www.multilingualexecutives.com/case.htm>
Language management
- <http://www.dialogin.com/>
Knowledge community on culture and communication in international business
- <http://www.aiesec.org/cms/aiesec/AI/Organisations/opportunities/online/>
AIESEC traineeship exchange organisation for business and economics
- <http://www.iaeste.org/>
IAESTE traineeship exchange organisation for professions in technology and engineering



LANGUAGES MEAN BUSINESS

Ten ways for small companies
to work better with languages

1. Dare to exploit your (hidden?) language skills

If your strategy contains tasks that will require using foreign languages, you will have to make an inventory of existing resources. Most of us have learned foreign languages at some point of time, without ever putting them to practical use. Do you know the linguistic potential of all your co-workers? Do you know your own? Re-invent yourself as a multilingual manager or encourage your business partners and staff to make an extra effort to put their dormant language skills acquired long ago into a new context.

2. Look for bilingual resources and clients that don't speak your language

Free movement within the Single Market in Europe, global migration flows and increased mobility in general have rapidly changed our societies. It is estimated that there are at least 175 different nationalities gathered within the borders of the EU. Not all your clients will speak your language, even within your own country. However, the number of naturally bi-lingual people is also growing. Find them and use them to reach new target groups.

3. Hire a trainee from a potential target market

Did you know that your company can benefit from talented trainees at a very low cost? Student placements are part of the EU's flagship programme for mobility in higher education, ERASMUS. Alternatively, through student-run networks such as AIESEC or IAESTE, you can get a foreign trainee for a limited period of time. These organisations operate all over the world. The profile of your trainee is up to you to define. Such temporary staff will not only bring language skills but also profound knowledge and understanding of foreign markets, which can prove invaluable for your new business ventures.

4. Invest in computer aided language courses

Language learning is not what it used to be. There is a rapidly growing market for tailor-made computer courses for different needs, purposes and even business areas. Such courses can be both convenient and cost-efficient, given that they are designed to be used flexibly and fit into the situation of individual professionals, with specific linguistic needs and limited time at their disposal. There are advanced applications available and many suppliers have a good track record.

5. Explore funding for mobility and training measures

The EU's Leonardo da Vinci Programme supports training and mobility schemes for SME's. There are also possibilities to apply for EU funding for setting up language networks and linguistic support structures for companies. Some of the web sites indicated in this paper will help you in your search.

6. Learn to use e-tendering

The Tenders Electronic Daily system is a useful tool for companies, opening up hundreds of public procurement opportunities in the European Economic Area in all the official languages via the Internet. One of the projects funded through the Leonardo da Vinci Programme had the aim to familiarize entrepreneurs and managers of small companies in manufacturing, crafts or services sectors with the routines of electronic tendering. A concrete result of this project is an on-line Guide for supporting e-tendering in Europe.

7. Think of the World Wide Web as your marketplace

In today's world, the emphasis has shifted from physical proximity to quality, which is often perceived as cultural proximity. If prices are competitive, the deciding factor that often determines which product or service consumers will buy is linking in with the consumer's values and ideas. Consequently, the rules of marketing have shifted, opening up completely new possibilities for business, regardless of size and location.

8. Use professional translators, communicators and localisation experts

Multilingual services, translation, interpretation, cultural mediation and international communication are important business sectors in their own right and provide ample opportunities for entrepreneurs. Translation of texts and globalisation of the economy are feeding each other in a rapidly accelerating circular movement. In order to reach out, you need to get your international marketing messages right for global markets.

9. Seek help from trade promotion networks and support platforms

It is a well known fact that companies which export tend to be more resilient in an economic downturn – they perform better and are less likely to have to lay people off. That is why governments across Europe seek to support small companies wishing to break into new markets. Such support is often focused on providing financial and legal advice. However, such strategies will involve communicating across language barriers as well.

10. Imagine. Create. Innovate.

Nothing new will come from doing things the way they have always been done before. If you want to "take your business to the world" you need to think differently. There is a Czech proverb that says: "You live a new life for every new language you speak. If you know only one language, you live only once". Research has shown that early exposure to more than one language increases divergent thinking strategies, helping not only in language-related tasks, but in other areas as well.

