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FOCUS YOUR TIME AND MONEY

Use The Right Language

Business is the same in any language, as the expression goes—but make sure you're conducting it in your customer's dialect.

Many American companies assume that because people in other countries speak English, they're fine continuing to conduct all their business in our language. That can lead to lost opportunities.

"Some American companies think about their international marketing efforts as an afterthought. We try to help them not do that and take advantage of marketing to those target audiences because they can be lucrative," said Translations.com President and Chief Executive Phil Shawe.

Building Bridges

Shawe and Liz Elting co-founded Translations.com in 1992 when they were attending New York University's business school. Amid the global economy, the pair saw the need for more translators. The company now has about 500 employees serving 1,000 companies while generating annual revenues of more than \$100 million. The company offers software translations, called localization services, along with document translations for things such as marketing materials and manuals.

"Quite a few of our customers found when they actually made the investment to offer marketing materials and Web sites in languages beyond English, their sales increased, and that's why they continue with those initiatives," Shawe said.

Take Avis Rent-A-Car: It's the second largest vehicle rental company in the world, and a significant portion of its business came from Canadian customers. Avis operated its Web site in English,

but learned that Canadian language laws required it to provide one in French as well. The company had no plans to globalize its site, but it hired Translations.com to translate it into French to come into compliance.

"After doing that, Avis had such an incredible jump in sales in French speaking Canada, not directed by regulatory forces but just market forces, they decided to engage us to translate their Web site into Spanish and Portuguese (for their Brazilian audience)," Shawe said.

It Starts at Home

Speaking the right language can capitalize on untapped opportunities domestically. For example, surveys show the U.S. Hispanic market is growing. With a population of more than 40 million people and purchasing power of \$680 billion, it's expected to grow to \$1 trillion by 2010. By then, Hispanics will account for 9% of all U.S. buying power. There are also 13 million Hispanic Internet users, and they tend to go online to do research before making certain purchases.

That's nothing to sneeze at.

"Generally we find when a customer makes an investment to do this, the numbers bear it out that they wind up making larger, future investments," Shawe noted.

Making the language leap creates good will among potential customers. When they see that your firm is making an effort to fit into their culture, they naturally become more comfortable and more willing to do business with you.

-- Michael Mink