



THE LANGUAGE FLAGSHIP

Creating Global Professionals



BUSINESS FOR DIPLOMATIC ACTION

Building New Bridges to The World

METRO LANGUAGE SERIES

NEW YORK

SEPTEMBER 24, 2008

INTRODUCTION

On September 24, 2008 ten representatives from businesses in and around the New York area convened to share their insights about the need for professional-level language and cultural skills in their businesses, be it for global or domestic markets and management. Participants contributed to the *Metro Language Series* which is co-sponsored by The Language Flagship, an initiative of the National Security Education Program at the U.S. Department of Defense; and by Business for Diplomatic Action, a non-partisan, non-profit, private sector organization.

Below please find a brief overview of the participants' experience, insights, and inspiration as it informed the discussion about the actual need for foreign language and cultural skills in the corporate sector and the role business can play in developing global professionals. Participants brought a broad range of experience in terms of their corporate responsibilities including human resource management, global marketing/sales/communications; global research collaboration; export assistance; and global transportation matters. Participants represented the following companies and organizations:

- Acxiom Corporation
- dotSUB, LLC
- Dynasty Resources, Inc.
- Harlem US Export Assistance Center/U.S. Department of Commerce
- The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey
- PR Newswire
- Studio One Networks.

SUMMARY OF NOTES

LANGUAGES THAT IMPACT YOUR BUSINESS: WHICH AND HOW?

Participants were asked to list which languages are of interest to their organization, currently (be it for global markets and workplaces; or domestic markets and workplaces). They then listed which languages they felt would be of interest five years from now. Those denoted with an asterick (“*”) were deemed by the group to be of particular importance to business.

Current Languages Needed

- Spanish
- Chinese/Mandarin
- French, Italian, German
- Russian
- Polish
- Arabic
- Portuguese/Brazil
- Hindi/Bengali
- Japanese
- Korean
- English is not the dominate language on the Internet

Languages Need in the Next Five Years (Note: “*” means especially important)

- Mandarin *
- Portuguese *
- Spanish (Latin America as a target market)
- French
- Hebrew (but only within Israel)
- Note: English on the rise
- Look at a variety of languages used over Internet (Indonesian, Bengali)
* growth areas

YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS: TOP USAGES FOR LANGUAGE

Participants were asked to generate, in writing, the top three usages of language skills in their corporations or those of their corporate clients. A discussion with additional points ensued. Note that each point made by a participant, either written or during discussion, is denoted as a separate point. The following is a compilation of those various ideas.

Sales/Business Development

- Taking orders/sales
- Client and account management
- Opening new markets (company expansions)
- Exploring new business opportunities

YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS: TOP USAGES FOR LANGUAGE – CONTINUED

Communications/Marketing

- Marketing
- Marketing communications
- Issue news releases and corporate messaging in many languages
- Multicultural story telling: public relations, marketing, entertainment, training
- U.S. – China marketing

Communications with Clients and Partners

- Communication with clients and prospects (aviation and port facility)
- Communicating and managing local workforces
- Communicating with potential clients and partners
- Cross-cultural interaction in both business and personal environments
- Customer outreach (aviation passengers)

Workforce Management

- Strong local business management
- Cross-national workforce management
- Managing multilingual, multicultural workforce
- Leadership development
- China's challenge: development of Chinese middle management
- Any time you take on a middleman, there is room for error. It is better to hire in-house (combination of U.S. and in-country).

Negotiations

- Developing/maintaining client relations in foreign countries
- Negotiating with local partners
- Negotiating artist contracts

YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS: TOP USAGES FOR LANGUAGE – CONTINUED

Negotiations -- continued

- Establish trust. Language is used for establishing trust. Keep your partners and staff who have these relationships.
- Business translator has command of business terms
 - Hire a U.S. person with language and cultural skills as a backup/help.
 - Be careful of relying on an outsider. They need to understand and share your objectives.
- Beware of simply handing materials over for translation. Companies need access to their team “back home” to clarify the materials.
- U.S. person with Chinese language skills
 - Identify a good in-country manager who truly understands what you are trying to achieve: a business “partner”
 - In early stages, one needs a good business translator who understands the product and what you are looking for in a partner.
- Need to provide the environment for a good translation and localization
- There is a big difference between large, established companies than for medium-sized companies that do not have the teams to negotiate.
- Legal expertise is needed for both sides (for example, Chinese legal firm on both sides)
- Bilingual contracts: need bilingual resources on U.S. team
- Local Chinese legal firm with bilingual resources
- Poland: local CEO is bilingual
- You, the client, need to know what the end objective is.

Translation

- Translating programs

PURPOSE AND LEVEL OF USAGE

Participants were asked to discuss what level of language and cultural skills are needed in their business dealings. The following notes reflect that discussion.

- Need for strong understanding of culture – formalities important for building relationships
- Communications via email and instant messaging across languages creates opportunity to communicate – be it English or other languages (for example, in Polish)
- Domestic need – dealing with foreign nationals in the U.S. (for example, in our airports)
- Need to be aware of the differences within a language or within one country – cultural nuances
- Establishing the relationship requires cultural understanding even before command of the language
- To use research you do not necessarily need a full understanding of the language
- Workforce management: need language skills in leadership positions regarding workforce effective across countries/culture (for example, acquiring a local company and then bringing it into the “home” corporate culture – standardizing and customizing products – but still need someone with language skills in-country)
- Use in-country nationals at management level with native language and English
- Marketing product & services
 - Customizing to the language for the website and marketing materials for overseas markets
 - For U.S. market, big opportunity to help market outside company’s materials for the U.S.
 - Translation and localization
 - Four “P”s: Product, Place, Price, Promotion
- Product team needs to work with a local marketing team
- Regarding the market-facing component, there are very few “global companies”– they are working locally with local agencies (often starting with an acquisition). It becomes a matter of branding.
- Machine translation
- Profound difference between translation and localization (localization is a huge, growing industry)
- Marketing to a variety of language groups within the U.S. (with nuances per region)

OPPORTUNITY COSTS TO YOUR BUSINESS, CLIENTS, AND STAFF

Participants were asked to discuss what losses they perceived in their business dealings if they do not have adequate language and cultural skills available to them. They were also asked how they can measure and value this loss to their company. The following notes reflect that discussion.

- Productivity loss (for example, bilingual managers below team leader can communicate with teams – leading to lack of clarity in multiple languages).
 - Tactically
 - Instructionally
 - Daily(for example, if paying less for workers, there is not a gain because of loss of productivity)
- Time – if you have language skills ready to go, you close the deal faster (for example, executive had Italian language skills so closed in Italy, but not elsewhere)
- Challenge: smaller companies tasked with producing results that may be language or culturally dependent solution.
Solution: hired in “Gold Key” program help through the U.S. Department of Commerce
- Buying: if you do not have the language skills you have to have a middleman who will end up mark up the price.
- The bigger mistakes made in business are not always immediately obvious but may have long-term negative effects (for example, poor investments)
- Port Authority
 - Security: developing relationships with other security agencies overseas
 - Potential of losing “business” to other ports because New York Port Authority not communicating with outside/international clients and vendors
- Competition positioning
- Lack of understanding creates lack of institutional support
- Loss of opportunities that we do not know about to begin with as we did not understand what was possible
- Loss of growth of business because of lack of languages and communications
- Limitation of creative solutions for problems/growth
- Negotiating with business partners

CURRENT SOLUTIONS TO YOUR NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Participants were asked to describe how they respond to language and cultural challenges currently. The following notes reflect that discussion.

- Hire in-country manager
- Peer and business partners in country
- Translation: person who translates
- Have native, bilingual capability on staff in U.S. and at overseas location
- Intensive language training for your staff (school and tutor)
- Providing English education
- Hiring foreign nationals already in the U.S.
- Bringing foreign nationals to U.S. for language education and business cultural (some in-house, some to outside programs)
- Note: visa problems with bringing people in to the U.S.
- Embracing new media and technologies (for example, looking at information in language on PDAs)

RESPONSES TO BUSINESS' CHALLENGES

The co-sponsors of the Metro Language Series session briefly reviewed what their respective organizations are coordinating in terms of cultural communications assistance and advanced language acquisition.

- Business for Diplomatic Action: *Building New Bridges to the World*
Mr. Thomas Miller, Vice President, Business for Diplomatic Action
<http://www.businessfordiplomaticaction.org>
- The Language Flagship: *Creating Global Professionals*
Dr. Robert O. Slater, Director, National Security Education Program
<http://www.thelanguageflagship.org>

WHAT ROLES CAN BUSINESS PLAY TO AFFECT CHANGE?

Participants discussed what role the business sector, individual businesses, and business people can play to help prepare the next generation of global professionals. The following notes reflect that discussion.

- Promote the Language Flagship “movement,” but not limit it to the current list of languages.
- Promote the Flagship alumni and what they are doing with their language skills in business.
- Partner with successful other efforts to help adapt Flagship model and gain advocates
- Appeal to and identify business leaders
- Create awareness, first, of the “critical role” of language in business.
- Leverage practical examples where the use of languages affects the bottom line.
- Companies have a responsibility to communicate its needs to education and to produce graduates for our businesses.
- Accessing U.S. business councils to bring the message forward and also joint organizations between U.S. and China for example.
- Get someone in business from each state on the “Board” of Flagship, providing them with a template for the message to be brought forth in each state.
- Point out the R.O.I. of investing in U.S. education versus paying to train someone later in their careers.
- Get a voice at key business conferences around the U.S.
- Appeal to business leaders through service to and support of the local economy.
- “Global Compact” (business ethics from the United Nations)
 - Research United Nations procurement
- Take the success story from Ohio and bring to New York for a roundtable (bring examples of business success)
- Leverage “cool” media around language education to raise awareness about the importance of languages
- Affect public perception, especially regarding the fear of globalization (be creative on a local level to make people aware of languages)
- Improve the quality of teaching of languages in the U.S.

WHAT ROLES CAN BUSINESS PLAY TO AFFECT CHANGE? – CONTINUED

- Make the case that learning languages earlier (i.e., K-12) improves their success rate in higher education, thus a better investment in these graduates (reduce remediation at the college level)

NEXT STEPS

Future Metro Language Series 2008

- Washington, D.C. October 14

Call for these participants to suggest other colleagues to engage with the Metro Language Series in the future to broaden the dialogue to include more companies and participants with a variety of backgrounds in the corporate world.