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Helping companies reach new customers overseas

Nov 28 2008 By Colin Calder

Special Report - International Trade With the huge potential for foreign trading, service sector firms have sprung up to give Scottish businesses a helping hand

Scotland's export business is often seen as the lifeblood of the country's economy. And with the current financial turmoil it has never been more important for firms to compete in the global marketplace.

Experts say that boosting existing international trade and encouraging more companies to open up new markets is vital to ensure revenues continue to grow - and help firms to survive the credit crunch.

The recent explosion in direct flights to and from Scotland has opened up significant new business opportunities for Scots firms in all corners of the world.

As a result, old geographical barriers to trade are being removed and business lobby groups say there has never been a better time for Scots firms to expand and establish new global trade links.

With the huge potential for foreign trading, a new group of service sector firms have sprung up to give Scottish businesses a helping hand in establishing trading links abroad.

When considering international trade opportunities it is now considered vital that you can communicate in the language of your new target markets.

Ejp Translations is a professional translation agency which focuses on the language requirements of Scots firms looking to do business abroad.

Liz Pascaud, owner of the company which is based in Beattock, Dumfriesshire, says: "EJP offers the Scottish-based business community an opportunity to have a guiding hand - locally-based - to aid them in translating and localizing their documentation and websites.

"This in turn is proven to open up international market opportunities as trading opportunities are always greater when communication is received in your mother tongue.

"Translation and language services are now a 'must have' for Scots firms wanting to trade internationally. It is vitally important to speak to potential new clients in their own language - advertising products and services work so much better when the target market actually properly understands the features and benefits of what is being sold."

Pascaud is well aware that there is a view among many Scots businesses that "everyone speaks English" - so they feel they don't need to bother with the additional cost of translation and language services.

She counters: "Whilst many people do think in this way, businesses that have localized their web messages and their marketing and promotional materials have seen significant increases in turnover and continue to invest in translation.

"Also, for companies opening up bases abroad, it is imperative that the locally based employees are fully-trained and are able to effectively sell the product - and for this, the only way is to teach them in their own language.

"In addition, firms must look at the legal and regulatory perspective where the company does not have a choice but to translate and provide literature in the target country's own language - not translating can therefore also be seen as a barrier to entry."

There are many translation companies in the marketplace but Pascaud believes that EJP's "personal touch" makes her company stand out from competitors. "Our client care sets us apart from our rivals. Nothing is too much trouble and we always go that extra mile to ensure our clients get what they pay for on time and are happy, no matter what. We are not a nine to five business bureau but are on hand 24/7."

The firm's mission is "putting the service back into this industry with human contact and true one to one client-supplier relationships".

Pascaud adds: "Customer service is critical because looking after someone and making them feel like your only client is what creates the relationship and this means that a future rapport is built whereby EJP almost becomes an extension of that other company.

"I also believe that when companies heavily invest in translation, they should expect great service as part of that cost."

Pascaud cautions businesses against thinking they can simply use an internet-based solution to their translation needs. "Web translations are literal - human translations are not.

"Literal translations do not take into account local cultures and customs, traditions and expressions.

Web translation tools are particularly inefficient and more often than not, grammatically incorrect. This could be disastrous for any company wanting to increase turnover and impress new clients."

Ejp prides itself on using only translators who are mother-tongue and professionally-certified, working within particular domains such as medical, legal and financial. "By using such highly-skilled resources we always avoid the pitfalls of sub-standard translation," maintains Pascaud. "Professional translators are skilled academics and they are absolutely the best people to do the job."

The agency typically charges around £100 per 1000 words for translation into a western European language. Pascaud says: "This may appear expensive as a stand alone figure but the extra revenue to be earned over time from translating sales tools makes the expense very worthwhile. It should be viewed as an investment rather than a cost."

Another vital element of an international trade strategy for Scots firms is getting to and from meetings with foreign business partners.

Edinburgh-based Colpitts specialises in travel management to a variety of Scottish business sectors including technology, pharmaceutical, biotechnology, finance and energy.

Despite the credit crunch the firm has recently undergone major expansion - investing in new technology and moving to larger premises.

Duncan Sanders, marketing manager, says: **"Despite a general slowing down in the economy, Colpitts have benefited from a client base that ranges across several industry sectors."**

"Although most industry sectors have peaks and troughs, the diversity of our client portfolio means that we are not subject to the same highs and lows.

We've found that over the years, as some industries reduce their travel spend others will increase it. The key is to have a good mix.

"We have been fortunate enough not to be affected by the slow down - rather than battenning down the hatches we have remained focused on our goals for expansion. Most of our clients are taking a similar approach and are continuing to travel regularly."

Sanders says there are a number of benefits to firms employing the services of a specialist rather than trying to organise business travel in-house.

"Using a travel management company not only improves time efficiencies but, more importantly, enables organisations to reduce their travel costs by tapping in to our wealth of knowledge. "As budgets become tighter it is important to be smart with your business travel and we are well versed in reducing costs without compromising on quality."

Saunders says Colpitts has seen growth across a number of industry sectors. **"Our energy clients are increasing visits to North Africa, Greenland, Cameroon and Gabon. Pharmaceutical and biotechnology firms are increasing trips to Massachusetts as well as increasing traffic within the Russian and South American markets. Finance and IT industries have remained stable in their travel habits, while manufacturing companies seem to be focusing on Eastern Europe and Russia. By identifying these key growth areas, we monitor the travel spend of clients and work closely with our airline and hotel partners to secure specially negotiated airfare route deals and hotel rates."**

"Such saving in the current economic climate ensures that clients are still in a position to make the necessary business travel required to promote international trade."

Boosting existing international trade and opening up new markets is vital.