

A & S – language strategies for export success

Since it was formed fourteen years ago, A & S Metallurgical Resources has been supplying consumables to iron, steel and aluminium foundries in the UK as well as overseas. The recent recruitment of a marketing development manager with linguistic skills has proven a shrewd move and has resulted in increased export business.

Small team – global markets

“We’re a comparatively small team,” explains Andrew Parker, Sales Office Manager at A & S. “There are only fourteen employees here at the Dronfield site, but we market our products around the world, and the language and cultural elements of doing business abroad are critical to our success.”

Its products for export are mainly speciality materials, and the company has had particular success in Turkey and in Spain, although it has also had a presence in markets such as South Africa, the Middle East and India.

John Hughes joined A & S as Marketing Development Manager three years ago. While his remit covers both the UK and abroad, his background in European Sales Management has proved valuable in developing sales overseas. John is a competent French speaker and has some knowledge of Spanish also. “France is an important future growth market for us,” he comments. “I plan to continue improving my French, because communication with clients in their own language is a key part of gaining their confidence and developing positive relationships.”

Languages improve business relationships

A & S works mainly through agents and distributors, so there is no language barrier when it comes to day-to-day business; but John makes regular joint visits to clients and potential customers and feels that embracing new languages and cultures is vital in building long-term rapport.

“We’ve increased export sales by £500,000 since I joined,” says John. “We’re particularly pleased with the way business has increased in Spain and Turkey. Not all of this is due just to my language skills of course, but I like to think they have made a positive contribution.”

Translation of the company’s promotional literature has also helped. Brochures are available in French, German, Italian, Portuguese and

Spanish to support the efforts of agents and distributors in those territories. A & S used a professional and well-established Sheffield translation agency using native speakers to produce the foreign language versions; they then had these checked by their overseas agents to make sure all the technical terminology had been accurately rendered. This thoroughness paid off when one of the trade names they use alerted the Spanish agent to the fact that it was very close to the Spanish word for 'castrate' – clearly not an appropriate image for their product!

The firm's website also caters for non-English speaking customers, with summary pages available in the same languages as the brochures; in addition, A & S has registered German (.de) and Spanish (.es) domain names.

Subsidised review of international communications

A & S is also taking advantage of help available to SMEs from UK Trade & Investment, in the form of an Export Communications Review. The review is a government-subsidised package that offers advice and practical recommendations for improving communications with overseas customers. For the price of just £50 + VAT, A & S will benefit from one day's consultancy with an independent expert, covering all aspects of the company's international communications.

Included in the price of the review is a personalised report, with an evaluation of A & S's current communications with overseas clients, and a list of recommendations for practical improvements that the company can achieve within the resources available. "Export is definitely a growth area for us," says Andrew Parker. "We plan to make use of an Export Communications Review, but we are already investigating possibilities such as employing native speakers – perhaps students on placement – or providing in-house language training for some of our key employees."

Contacts

A & S

www.asmet.co.uk

Export Communications Review

Tel: 024 7669 4484

www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk

Regional Language Network East Midlands

helps East Midlands companies access more international trade opportunities by breaking down language and cultural barriers. The RLN offers a central point of contact for information and support on international communications, and provides valuable commercial information through events, newsletters and briefings.

**RLN East Midlands, UK Trade and Investment,
International Trade Centre, Innovation House,
Riverside Park, Raynesway, Derby, DE21 7BF.**

Tel: 01332 826432 | www.rln-eastmidlands.com