

Bambino Mio Limited – languages helping the drive for increased overseas sales

Northampton-based Bambino Mio is a specialist producer of cotton nappies and associated products. Founded in 1996 by Guy Schanschieff, the company has grown quickly and has a current turnover of £3m; the company plans to increase this to £10m by 2006, when around half of its sales are expected to be from countries outside the United Kingdom.

“Doing business in languages other than English is an essential part of our drive to increase our sales overseas,” says the company’s MD, Guy Schanschieff. “The growth in our business between now and 2006 will come in large part from sales to continental Europe, and we simply can’t expect consumers there to purchase our products unless we communicate with them, and our distributors, in their own language.”

Commitment to languages underpins strategy

This philosophy underpins all the company’s overseas trading. The extensive Bambino Mio website offers is accessible in a staggering option of fifteen languages. The translations were carried out by a professional translation agency in Cambridge in consultation with the company’s overseas distributors. “The cost was significant,” says Guy Schanschieff, “but we are serious about establishing ourselves in these countries and believe that the sales we will generate will more than justify the cost.” In addition to the website, all the firm’s literature and packaging, as well as its promotional video, is produced in the local language of the target market.

Currently, export sales represent just under 10% of the company’s sales; France, Portugal and Belgium are the main markets. Entry into other countries has been the result of clear strategic planning and meticulous recruitment of overseas distributors through trade fairs and other contacts. The company’s willingness to produce web-based and other materials in local languages has led to enthusiastic partnerships with agents throughout the EU.

Recruitment of language speakers has brought results

The company has recruited a number of employees with language skills to support the drive to increase export sales. In 2003, it hired two overseas students, Antoinette and Alex, from Switzerland. The two worked on targeting potential distributors before a major European



trade fair. Like many of their compatriots, both are multi-lingual, speaking Italian, French, German and English: their ability to converse in all these languages meant that they succeeded in establishing distributors in a dozen countries.

“The ability to communicate with distributors by phone in their own language is really important,” remarks Antoinette. “It rules out the need for a middleman and therefore ultimately saves the company money.” Alex is also convinced of the key

role that languages have played in developing Bambino Mio's overseas network. "Obviously we cannot converse in every one of the EU languages," he reflects, "but usually we can find a mutually understood tongue – for example when we speak German to our distributor in the Czech Republic."

During the early part of 2004, the organisation recruited a Dutch national, Jacob van Leeuwen. With fluency in German and English and good competences in French and Spanish, he was able to target further distributors for the 2004 *Kind und Jugend* trade fair in Cologne: discussions held at the fair will, the company hopes, lead to increased sales in new territories.

More challenges to come

Bambino Mio was a finalist in the 2003 East Midlands Languages for Export awards: it is clearly a prime example of how languages, as part of a systematic and committed export strategy, can bring benefits in terms of increased sales. But even for such a successful company, there are still further barriers to be overcome. Currently there are issues to be resolved about dealing with Greek distributors, with whom the team share no common language; and discussions are taking place about providing a separate version, using a Flemish speaker, of the Dutch voiceover for the promotional video for the Belgian market.

Such recognition of the importance of languages, as well as a commitment to customer service, mean that the company will no doubt continue to increase its profits from overseas markets in coming years.

Contacts

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Regional Language Network East Midlands

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