

Chesterfield Special Steels

A comparatively new organisation with a well-established parent company, Chesterfield Special Steels are specialist suppliers of Carbon, Alloy and Stainless Forging and Engineering Steels. Their long-term relationship with an Italian supplier, along with a strategic effort to structure a supply base in industrial Northern Italy, led them to arrange language training for their management and marketing team.

When companies organise language training for their staff, their motivation is often to increase overseas sales or to improve relationships with clients. But in the case of Chesterfield Steel Services, it was a relationship with an overseas supplier of steel that led them to commit to learning Italian.

Strategic importance

Berry Wilson, one of the company's Directors, explains: *"We had been dealing with Italy for a number of years, and their supply to us of specialist steel meant that strategically they were very important to us."*

Some language skills already existed within the 40-strong company: Berry herself had studied French and Italian during her university days and co-director Duncan Cliff had made some efforts to undertake self-study in German. However, during discussions at senior management level, a decision was made to develop a more systematic approach to language training.

Adds Berry: *"As a relatively small organisation, our relationships with suppliers are key to our success. We had been dealing successfully in English with our Italian provider for a number of years, but we decided that those staff involved on a day-to-day basis with our Italian suppliers should gain some basic competence in the language."*

Chesterfield Steel Services therefore sourced a local provider of corporate language training and asked them to quote for the provision of Italian tuition for four members of the team, including Duncan Cliff. As a result, the quartet have begun monthly sessions in the language, and the benefits are already beginning to become apparent.

Positive reaction

"When our supplier discovered that we had started Italian language training, the reaction could not have been more positive," comments Duncan. *"They took it as an indication of the importance of the relationship we had with them and at an individual level were certainly ready to give us the opportunity to improve our abilities in the language."*

Following the start of the Italian training, Berry Wilson has herself decided to commit to some one-to-one training in French. She comments: *"While my French from university days is still at a reasonable level, there are some elements of using the language for business purposes that I felt I needed to develop, and my improved ability to communicate in French will be a useful part of our strategy to develop our sales in continental Europe."*

Future plans include languages

Now that the positive consequences of language training provision are apparent, Chesterfield Special Steels' future plans include the possibility of adding Spanish to the mix of languages spoken. Whether for its dealings with suppliers or customers, the company's commitment to being able to negotiate in languages other than English is an important component of its future plans.

<p>Contacts</p> <p>www.chesterfieldsteels.co.uk</p> <p>This case study was written by Peter Harvey of the The Language Business, on behalf of the Regional Language Network</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>RLN East Midlands, UK Trade and Investment, International Trade Centre, Innovation House, Riverside Park, Raynesway, Derby, DE21 7BF.</p> <p>Tel: 01332 826432 www.rln-eastmidlands.com</p>
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