

## Elastogran – learning languages provides personal and corporate benefits

*The Alfreton-based producer of polyurethane products, part of the BASF group of companies, has seen important benefits from its long-term commitment to German language training.*

With eleven manufacturing sites across Europe, Elastogran is a major player in its field. The site at Alfreton, Derbyshire has over 50 staff and offers foamed polyurethane systems for use in industries ranging from shoes to automobiles. Having a German parent company has meant that the UK site has made an important commitment to language training.

### **Five-year commitment to language training**

Catherine Graham, the company's Human Resources Officer, explains that Elastogran have been undertaking German language training since 2000. *"At that time," she comments, "the senior management meetings that were held at the company's HQ in Lemförde would be in German. It soon became clear that we would need to develop the language skills of a number of our team so that they could participate more fully with German colleagues."*

To this end, Catherine sourced and found a Derbyshire-based supplier of language training, Commercial Language Training, who devised a programme of training to meet the company's requirements. One of the first learners involved back in 2000 was the company's Managing Director, Colin Dunn. He remarks: *"It was evident that I needed to be able to participate in meetings where German was the language being used. As a beginner, I recognised that this was a serious commitment, but I was motivated to do it for both personal and business reasons."*

Colin's progress is a success story: five years later, after undertaking regular training and committing to self-study, he is able to function in German in meetings with colleagues and is also able to use his language skills to make presentations.

### **UK customers have benefited from structured programme**

But there have also been benefits for others participating in the training. Catherine Graham explains: *"Many of the learners have been part of our External Technical Adviser team, who offer technical support to our customers in the UK. However, they are in regular contact with their counterparts in Lemförde, and the ability to converse in German has been*

*important in building a relationship that ultimately improves the service we provide to our UK clients."*

The programme offered over the past five years by Commercial Language Training has been structured to allow consistent progress through various levels of language competence. The company has used the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) exam board's business language assessments to take learners from level 1 – routine use of the language in predictable situations – to level 4, where they would be expected to establish and sustain business relationships in German. Catherine Graham explains that most of the External Technical Advisers have reached LCCI levels 3 or 4, and that those who have reached the top level continue to attend conversational sessions with the trainers to keep their language up to date.

#### **Language capability underpins career move**

*"One of our Advisers has recently been offered a four-year secondment to Germany," she adds. "That is important for his career development, and there's no doubt that the move would have proved impossible had he not previously reached a good level of competence with the language."*

Managing Director Colin Dunn concurs: *"The investment we have made in language training over the past five years has been substantial, but the benefits we have seen in the organisation have more than justified the cost. Language training will continue to be an important element in developing our team here at Alfreton."*

#### **Contacts:**

##### **Elastogran**

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This case study was written by Peter Harvey of the The Language Business, on behalf of the Regional Language Network.

#### **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.

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# Case study

