

## **E.ON Power Technology – languages bringing bottom-line benefits**

*Based at Ratcliffe-on-Soar, near Nottingham, E.ON Power Technology is an engineering, scientific and technology consultancy that works with energy sector businesses throughout the world. Formerly known as PowerGen (UK) plc, the company has 220 employees and an annual turnover of £22 million. Its parent company is German, and 15% of E.ON Power Technology's business is from overseas customers.*

### **Practical business benefits**

Describing E.ON Power Technology's relationship with its German parent, Derrick Farthing, Managing Director, depicts his organisation as a "small company within a big company." Overseas projects are an important part of the firm's portfolio, and often yield the highest margins. As a German speaker, Derrick is well aware of the practical business benefits of speaking a foreign language, whether for building and maintaining good relationships with colleagues or winning lucrative overseas consultancy work, and he has "no doubt that languages have made a positive contribution to our bottom line."

Derrick cites many examples of the ways in which foreign language skills have benefited the company. In 2000, his team secured a £1m contract in Mexico after preparing the entire proposal and documentation in Spanish, and offering a Spanish-speaking project manager. "I believe our success in winning this contract was in large part due to our making the extra effort necessary to communicate with the client in their first language," says Derrick. "Training our project manager to speak Spanish paid dividends: not only did we win this piece of business, but other contracts have been offered to us since, now that customers know we will go the extra mile for them."

### **Not everyone speaks English**

Derrick's personal experience with languages has also been positive. Despite his busy schedule, he makes time to join the weekly on-site training in German delivered by *The Language Business*, a Derbyshire-based provider. "Having some competence in German has been very advantageous for me," he comments. "It's simply not true that everyone out there speaks English: away from the larger cities, being able to speak the language is especially important, both for everyday travelling and for building customer relationships."

And even outside Germany, the language has proved useful. During a trip to Russia, Derrick discovered that although neither the client nor he spoke each other's language, they did have German in common and were able to use that to communicate, as well as being able to call on the interpreters when required. "This definitely made a positive impression on the client," he remarks. "Being British, it's sadly not expected that you will have language skills, but when you are able to communicate, it's seen as very constructive."

### **Staff are reaping the benefits**

The company was acquired by E.ON three years ago, but the organisation's commitment to language training goes back to 1995. Some of the staff who have attended since this time are now reaping the benefits. Philip Belben has been a regular attendee for a number of years and has just started a three-month assignment in Germany for the company. He is now looking forward to the challenges and new experiences of living and working abroad, and is convinced his language skills will prove very important. Philip comments: "I'm delighted that my German skills are being put to good use. I couldn't have taken on the assignment in this way had I not spoken German, and I know the experience will be a positive one, both for me and for the company."

Karin Schimmelschulze is the trainer for *The Language Business* who delivers the weekly classes, using the Accelerated Learning methodology. She is very enthusiastic about the results. "The method equips learners very quickly with the necessary strategies to assimilate the language," she comments. "In addition, it is very far removed from the experiences that many of my learners had with foreign languages at school – they are motivated by how quickly they are learning and by how they can put the language into practice during trips to Germany the language they know."

For Derrick Farthing, the commitment to the training he and his staff are undertaking goes beyond just equipping them with language skills. "Learning languages is a key part of understanding culture – our aim is to understand our customers' needs and to respond to them appropriately. Speaking their language is an important step towards achieving this goal."



**Signposting**

**E.ON Power Technology**

www.eon-uk.com/powertechnology

**The Language Business**

Tel: 01335 330808  
www.language-business.co.uk

**For more about RLN East Midlands please contact us at:**

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

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Case study