



A healthy mix of language and cultural strategies

Northern Edge International Limited

Northern Edge prides itself on being at the forefront of a very niche market. It was founded in 1999 to market and distribute a new health food - organic milled flax seed – initially in the UK. Based in Ilford, Northern Edge is now the leading global supplier of the flax seed, selling to established retailers in the UK such as Harrods and Sainsbury's. In addition, it works in partnership with another organisation to make worldwide Internet sales. Yet it remains a small company, with just three employees. The company's approach illustrates how a small business can gain access to the language and cultural expertise needed for international success.

The value of local cultural knowledge

'From the start, we recognised that replicating our UK success in international markets would require an understanding of different dietary cultures,' says Max Brookman, Northern Edge's Marketing Manager, 'together with an understanding of how best to market the product abroad'. Whereas the British readily accept the notion of sprinkling a food supplement onto their breakfast cereal, a different product format and marketing strategy is needed in, for example, Southern Europe.

Breaking into European markets

Northern Edge's key European markets are Spain, France and Germany. 'We needed to educate potential retailers and consumers in those countries of the health benefits of flax seed,' continues Mr Brookman. 'A multilingual website is an important, yet cost-effective, means of achieving this'. Accordingly, Northern Edge's entire main website is available in Spanish. As a result, Northern Edge now has several contacts in Spain. Work is progressing on website pages in French, to be followed by German.

As a small company, Northern Edge decided to leverage its position by appointing a European export business agent. With the agent's assistance, Northern Edge has benefited from a presence at a number of international exhibitions and has prepared product labels in Spanish and French, which incorporate translated usage instructions. The agent follows up sales leads using a team of local native speakers.

Northern Edge is a small company working with limited resources, so was happy when it was able to use the language services of a Spanish student in the UK on an exchange programme. It has also engaged professional linguists, where necessary, to assist with sales follow-up.

Using language skills to build a rapport

'We are pleased with the results we have achieved by working with our agent', comments Mr Brookman, 'but we recognise that we can achieve even greater sales success when we ourselves speak our customers' language'. Mr Brookman has a degree in French and finds that any attempt to communicate in French helps to build a rapport with his French customers. 'They really appreciate any attempt I make to use French in our dealings, even if my technical French isn't good enough to finalise the deal'.

Staying in front

'Our business has expanded as the health food market has grown all round the world', concludes Mr Brookman. 'Our foreign language website and language skills have assisted our expansion'.

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www.healthdivine.com

www.northernedge.org.uk

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