

Q: What do we call a person who speaks two languages? A: *Bi-lingual*

Q: What do we call a person who speaks three languages? A: *Tri-lingual*

Q: What do we call a person who only speaks one language? A: *British!*

It's an old joke, but sadly as true today as ever it was. Most of us Brits (and our American cousins too) are pretty poor at languages. Our command of them runs to basic tourist functionality at best. Ask us to communicate beyond the bistro or ticket office and we default to ponderous repetition of the message in English with elaborate gestures to illustrate its content. Even when we do know the occasional word, our confidence deserts us. A request for "il conto", "la cuenta", "die rechnung" or "l'addition" is still likely to be accompanied by hands held high with one executing a frantic scribbling motion on the palm of the other.

Whilst it might be a source of some amusement, for anyone trying to run an international business this sort of communication barrier can be deeply frustrating.

The global sales organisation trying to ensure its people use a consistent and shared methodology meets a range of reactions from simple but time-consuming misunderstandings through to outright resistance. In between, whether it's accidental or deliberate, local corruption of the message dilutes its impact.

Many try to get round the problem by specifying English as their required 'business language'. But it's hard to enforce, especially if the executive floor is a long way away, geographically, organisationally, or both! At local operational levels, English language skills become understandably flaky. It's often impossible and unreasonable to expect them to learn new skills or procedures in anything other than their native language. Sending out multi-lingual trainers might help, but whilst they can communicate the message they may not always understand the local business culture in which it is to be applied.

The alternative is to contract with some local partners. But how are they identified? How can they be trusted?

At Huthwaite International we have over 30 years experience of rolling out consistent sales improvement projects across the world using our network of partners in different countries. They are no loose association of 'hired guns', but part of a community that has quality and integrity as core values. Many of them have been with us almost from the start of our international operations. They are not just trainers – all are local business people in their own right who know the dynamics and

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subtleties of their countries' markets. They deliver the message consistently, but with due account of local business sensitivities and customs. This is especially important in emerging markets, such as Eastern Europe, India and the Far East, where we have well established partners.

In other words...

...Q: What do we call an organisation that speaks 33 languages (in 47 countries)?

A: *Huthwaite International!*

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