

# The ADVOCATE.

## Turning to translation

### *Consultants join forces, offer expanded human resources services*

By Richard Lee  
Assistant Business Editor  
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It may cover only a corner of Connecticut, but lower Fairfield County also is an international business center where companies employ armies of people overseas and bring foreign talent here to fill mission-critical jobs.

These work forces have created human resources issues, including dealing with employees in other nations and workers in the United States who have limited or no English-language skills.

Some firms have turned to Stamford-based human resources consulting firm that has established a new venture, HR Related Translation Services, in partnership with Attorney Translation Services of Old Greenwich.

#### **Wary of words**

Experts say getting it wrong when translating human resource material can spell trouble for a non-English speaking employee overseas or one who works for a business in the United States

"The creation of this service is directly tied to meeting the growing needs of our clients, many of whom engage employees who are more confident in their understanding of their native language than they are with English," said David Lewis, chief executive officer of OperationsInc.

Finding translators who are well-versed in business terminology and can properly translate legal and human resource documents is no easy task, said Lewis, who met Wheatleigh Dunham, operator of Attorney Translation Services, at a CEO Roundtable event.

Dunham, however, has developed a cadre of about 1,600 translators with expertise in many businesses sectors beyond his firms original legal focus. His linguists have translated documents into more than 30 languages.

"We just don't match languages. We also match the subject matter expertise. We work with people who are qualified experts in their fields," Dunham said. "Thanks to the Internet, we work with subject matter experts around the world."

Getting it wrong when translating human resource material can spell trouble for a non-English speaking employee overseas or one who works for a business in

the United States, said Lewis, who established his business in 2001.

"We have a number of clients in manufacturing and financial services, including foreign exchange and commodities, as well as a country club," he said. "Their (employees') verbal skills may be good, but not their reading."

Employment documents such as applications, policy manuals, confidentiality and non-compete clauses can be bewildering for many non-English speaking employees, Lewis said, stressing that employers must demonstrate that their workers fully understand the information.

"This is a significant way for a client to limit its liability and exposure," he said, adding that Spanish is the first language that Lewis is providing to his clients. "It's the one universally we've been asked for. We can translate to pretty much any language."

He expects French to be next.

Dunham's clients include law firms, corporate legal offices, foreign and domestic government agencies, nonprofits and academic institutions. Most clients come through referrals or Attorney Translation Services' Web site.

"OperationsInc. is the first stand-alone HR business we've done translations for. It's a one-stop resource for companies that want to make their HR materials available to their employees. Confidentiality is a hallmark of our business. We encrypt it and send it back," said Dunham, who speaks Russian, Japanese and Chinese.

Having a document precisely translated is critical to employer and employee, said Lisa Mercurio, director of the Fairfield County Information Exchange, a unit of the Business Council of Fairfield County.

"You have to take into consideration the cultural, as well as the literal, translation," she said. "With HR, you have to be sensitive to those nuances. There's a level of skill that smaller businesses don't have in-house."

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