

Liverpool Water Witch Sets Sail for China

the challenge

For forty years a fleet of floating litter collectors called Water Witches have been a familiar sight on the docks of the River Mersey. Since 1963 the Liverpool-based family business has tirelessly been cleaning up the polluted waters of the city with their patented marine clean-up vessels.

With their sights set on global market-share, the founders of Liverpool Water Witch were quick to recognise the international potential of these 'floating JCBs'. Already established in 14 countries across the globe – including South Africa, America and the Middle East – it was clear that there were plenty more opportunities to sell the patented equipment abroad.

The news that China was tightening up its anti-pollution laws was just the incentive the company needed to embark on a new export campaign.

But, as export manager, Jackie Caddick, was well aware, knowing where to start was the difficult part.

"We'd already entered the English speaking Hong Kong and Macao market several years before," she explains. "So we had some background knowledge of the Far East. But there was no point going over to China unprepared. What we needed, before we even considered a proactive sales campaign, was some professionally translated promotional material and a thorough understanding of Chinese business ethos."

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Liverpool Water Witch



the water witch team

joe caddick

the solution

The idea of improving overseas communication was at the forefront of company director Joe Caddick's mind when he received a call from the RLN NW's partner, Liverpool University's Language Learning Centre.

"A representative from the Language Learning Centre paid us an initial visit to assess our language competence and highlight any areas for development," he recalls. "We explained our plans to enter into the Chinese market. The Language Learning Centre developed a comprehensive international communication plan to arm us with the tools needed to break into the Chinese market."



Top on the list of priorities was translating the company's brochure, website, technical glossary and marketing correspondence into Chinese. "There was no point even attempting to sell to the Chinese without translated literature," says Joe. "Our equipment is fairly technical so it was absolutely vital that any promotional material accurately reflected our product in the prospective customers' own language.

"To cope with the potential problem of responding to Chinese emails, we teamed up with a local specialist translation company to deal with any enquiries promptly and accurately."

As well as translating printed material, the Language Learning Centre arranged for Liverpool Water Witch's promotional video to be interpreted into Chinese. Professional actors' voices were dubbed over the English recording and the content was re-scripted to appeal to the Chinese market.

However, it wasn't just the complexities of the language that needed to be addressed – the traditions of the country also played a crucial role in establishing relationships in the East. A series of cultural awareness training sessions were organised to fully prepare Joe for the vastly different business environment in China.

"It's one thing presenting nice brochures," says Joe, "but it's quite another understanding the philosophy and etiquette of that country. First impressions count in business – and that couldn't be more relevant in China, where subtleties in behaviour can make or break a business relationship."

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the benefits

Following 12 long months of preparation, translation and cultural briefings, Joe, accompanied by a specialist Chinese interpreter, went on a trade mission to Shanghai. And the many hours of planning and research finally paid off – as interest in the Water Witches proved.

"Both the printed material and the video went down extremely well," says Joe, "and it was obvious that the delegates appreciated the time and effort we had invested to make our offerings accessible to them. We made several particularly useful contacts, all showing real enthusiasm for the Witches. I'm convinced that was due in no small way to our international communication plan."

And the cultural briefing sessions Joe received in the months leading up to the visit certainly weren't wasted either. "Communication is about so much more than just words," he says. "Much of my success in China depended on non-verbal communication to break the ice.

"It was the little things that really made the difference over there – like making sure I presented my business cards Chinese side up, with both hands, not one. And, unlike the West, Chinese business people like to get to know you on a social level before they even think about discussing business. Those were the kind of tips that paid dividends when it came to establishing trust and respect."

With relationships with several major Chinese companies already established, Joe is confident it will only be a matter of time before Liverpool Water Witch begins to reap the rewards of its investment.

"We achieved exactly what we intended," he concludes. "We made contact with some potentially valuable prospective customers – and we also managed to impress them with our preparation and knowledge of the Chinese business market. I'm confident it'll only be a matter of time before we start to see the results."