



**TRANSLATE, PLEASE**  
Demand is high for business document translation, **Steve Iverson** has found.

STRATEGIES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES  
**Business Plans**

# Translating for growth

Document translation demand grows as business moves overseas

BY RACHEL MCCORMICK-JENNINGS

For Iverson Language Associates Inc., finding good translators to interpret written businesses documents in other languages can be difficult. There's no certification to be a translator and resumes showcasing where a person studied a language don't show the level of a person's skills.

To overcome those obstacles, Iverson Language has developed a thorough screening process that translators must pass in order to be considered for a position with the Milwaukee firm, 1616 N. Farwell Ave.

‘Using a document translation company allows us to **ALLCOATE OUR RESOURCES INTO EXPANDING OUR business.**’

Iverson, the firm's president and founder.

To ensure Iverson Language contracts with the best translators, company representatives look at writing samples and call references. Iverson said translators must also be native speakers of the language and must have some expertise in the industry for which they're translating.

For example, a translator interpreting an automotive catalog from English to Hmong should be an automotive engineer who cannot only speak the language, but also is a good writer.



PHOTOS BY SCOTT PAULUS

Steven Iverson .. “One of our policies is if someone says they can translate anything, it's a red flag.”

“In a sense we scan our translators like a recruiting agency scans potential candidates,” Iverson said.

### Work increasing

The need for Iverson Language's services is skyrocketing because of the amount

### IVERSON LANGUAGE ASSOCIATES INC.

**President:** Steven Iverson  
**Year founded:** 1986  
**Employees:** 30  
**Address:** 1661 N. Farwell Ave., Milwaukee  
**Web site:** [www.iversonlang.com](http://www.iversonlang.com)  
**Annual revenue:** \$4 million  
**Business plan:** Provide document translation to businesses  
**Growth plan:** Continue to use sales efforts to add clients based on the firm's experience and reputation. Maintain 20 percent annual growth rate.

of work being shipped to China and other countries.

Iverson Language has continued to increase its annual revenue 20 percent a year since 2001. Iverson, 45, projects his company will ring up about \$4 million in annual revenue in 2006 compared with about \$3 million in 2005. In 2011, Iverson predicts, his company's annual revenue will reach \$10 million.

Iverson plans to grow his company through direct sales and acquisitions. Iverson is looking to acquire a document translation firm with fewer than 30 employees that specializes in similar indus-

## LESSONS LEARNED

tries as Iverson Language. In 2003, Iverson acquired Wordnet Inc., a document translation company in Boston. Iverson acquired the firm's clients and closed the Boston location.

"The goal is to keep production in Milwaukee and have sales offices in other states," he said.

The firm, which can translate documents in more than 90 different languages, employs 30 people and has more than 1,000 subcontracted translators in 20 countries.

"Document translation used to just be for businesses that exported," said Iverson, who is fluent in French. "Now the global market has opened up many opportunities for other businesses."

Iverson Language translates documents in industries such as health care, medical research, education, manufacturing and catalog production. The firm charges at least 27 cents per word for translation, with some of its jobs totaling more than 1,800 pages of written text.

Iverson Language wasn't always a document translation company.

The firm started out as a language instruction business in 1986. Iverson and two college friends, who spoke Spanish, German and French, taught the languages to students and professionals. Iverson started the company after his contract with Whitnall High School, Greenfield, was not renewed to teach French.

After a local newspaper profiled the business in the late 1980s, requests to translate business documents began pouring in, Iverson said.

In 1992, Iverson transitioned from teaching languages to translating documents into various languages for companies that do business worldwide because the demand to translate documents outweighed the need for language instruction.

### Saving money

The company has approximately 200 clients, including Wacker Corp., Menomonee Falls; Pemco Inc., Sheboygan; Digi-Key Corp., Thief River Falls, Minn.; and Royal Caribbean International in Miami.

Outsourcing language translation operations saves companies money, Iverson said.

Pemco, a manufacturer of paper packaging, has saved about \$40,000 a year working with Iverson Language, said Lee Schneider, a senior technical writer with Pemco.

**What was the reason for starting your business?** "I was looking for a way to use my love of teaching and my language expertise. Initially, it was a part-time job that allowed me to keep doing what I loved. Over time, it evolved into a much larger commitment which has provided even greater challenges, and I still get to use my language skills."

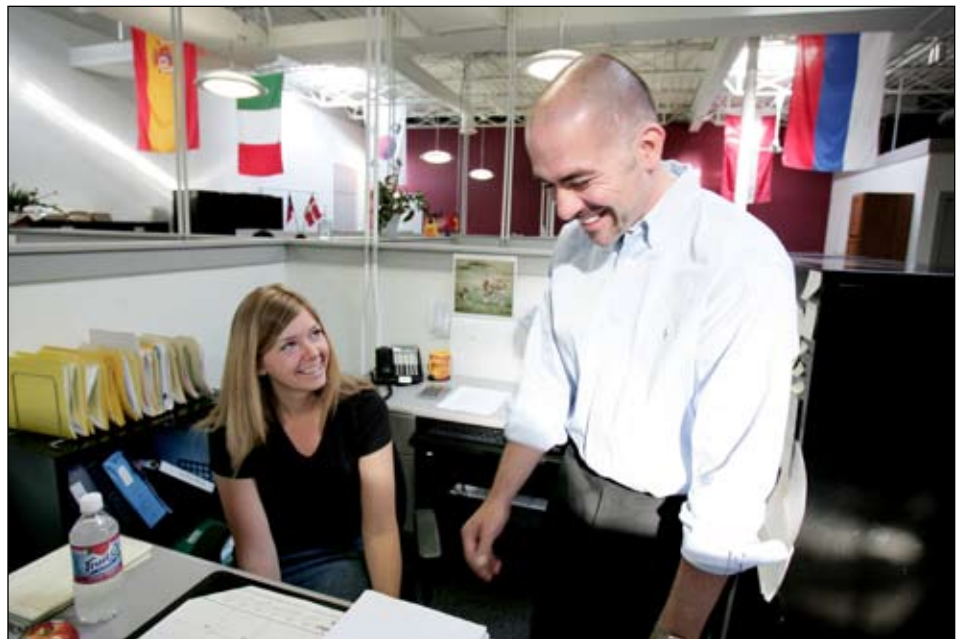
**What was your worst business decision?** "Offering too many services. At one point, we tried to be all things to all people, and it didn't work. We're focused on helping our clients find strategic solutions to their document translation needs, and that's all we do."

**What is the best way to keep a competitive edge?** "Listening to customers is the most important thing we do. They can tell you where they're going and where their industries are going. If you listen carefully, they will give you clues about where you should direct your efforts in staying ahead of the competition."

**What is your goal yet to be achieved?** "We continue to strive to meet our sales goals, with a continued focus on quality and service. This gives our clients a sense of stability, and knowledge that we're able to make continuous investments in new technologies to benefit them."

**Who is your most respected competitor?** "Lingo System in Portland, Ore. They have been in business for 25 years, and have a reputation for excellent quality and service."

### Steven Iverson



Steven Iverson works with project manager Leah Wanta at Iverson's east side offices.

"We've cut staff who we didn't use," Schneider said. "With their expertise, we've been able to funnel our writing needs to them."

Because Iverson Language produces materials for Pemco in German, Italian, French, Spanish, Swedish, Chinese, Finnish and Portuguese, the company doesn't have to employ translators full-time.

"Using a document translation company allows us to allocate our resources into expanding our business, which keeps us competitive," Schneider said.



A Web site Iverson translated for a client.