The University Of Nottingham

Relationship Marketing: The Case of Betterlanguages.com Ltd

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MSc International Business

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ABSTRACT

This study will examine Relationship Marketing within B2B services, focusing on the translation agency Betterlanguages.com Ltd as a case in point. Betterlanguages.com Ltd is a small translation agency based in the East Midlands that currently specialises in label and packaging translation for high-street retailers. As they operate in a niche market the use of a case study will be the best suited approach to explore how their business functions and for researcher to produce a study that will be of use to the company. The objectives of this study are twofold; firstly, to examine the relationships between Betterlanguages.com Ltd and their clients, with a focus on how relationships are developed maintained. Secondly, to recommend Relationship Marketing strategies through which customers' relationships can be strengthened and customers retained in the long run by Betterlanguages.com Ltd, and potentially other B2B service firms.

Therefore, the potential contribution of this research is to gain academic and managerial understanding of translation agency-client relationships, and to explore how such firms might exploit Relationship Marketing strategies to their advantage.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Marketing has until recently has been dominated by conventional marketing strategies such as the 'marketing mix', the infamous 4Ps framework, such a view of marketing is starting to become less dominant with the emergence of the Relationship Marketing paradigm (Grönroos 1994a, 1994b). Research has shown a new focus on customer loyalty and retention strategies rather than merely seeking to attract new customers. Thus building customer relationships and thereby the concept of Relationship Marketing has come to the forefront of marketing research and has been advocated as a managerial strategy to obtain competitive advantage.

1.2 RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

However, despite growing research on Relationship Marketing, particularly in service firms, there is a lack of continuity amongst scholars and research is argued to be at its embryonic stage (Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995). Whilst Relationship Marketing has drawn scholarly attention from the early 1980s, much of the focus is on the service industry and not business-to-business marketing. Furthermore, there is a lack of continuity amongst scholars which means that is difficult to draw parallels across studies and thus there is a call for a standardisation of terminology for both academics and marketing practitioners. This dissertation aims to contribute to existing research on Business-to-Business service Relationship Marketing, specifically in the context of the translation agency as well as to managerial understanding of Relationship Marketing.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of this project is to develop an understanding into the key relationship constructs valid in Betterlanguages.com Ltd's client relationships and in particular to focus on relationship development and customer retention.

Thus, the objectives of this study are twofold; firstly, to examine the relationships between Betterlanguages.com Ltd and their clients, with a focus on how relationships are developed maintained. Secondly, to recommend Relationship Marketing strategies through which customers' relationships can be strengthened and customers retained in the long run by Betterlanguages.com Ltd, and potentially other B2B service firms. Therefore, the potential contribution of this research is to gain academic and managerial understanding of B2B client-service firm relationships, and to explore how such firms might promote and maintain relationships with clients.

Hence this research project attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Which theoretical concepts are most appropriate to describe the content of a translation company-client relationship?
2. How can Betterlanguages.com Ltd build successful client relationships and retain clients?

1.4 Methodology

The initial selection of research topic stems from the researcher's personal interest in the field of marketing as well as a previous undergraduate degree in modern foreign languages. Therefore the opportunity to work in collaboration with a translation company was particularly appealing and an initial literature search led to discovery of growing research in the field of Relationship Marketing. Thus the researcher reviewed secondary data before proceeding to answer the research question previously discussed. In order to fulfil the aims of the research, this study is presented as a case study and the primary data collected was in the form of participant observation and nine interviews (four staff face-to-face interviews and five telephone interviews). This data was then cross-analysed and interpreted to lead to the development of conclusions, further research suggestions and managerial recommendations.

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation will be divided into six chapters. The introduction briefly outlines the theoretical base, research aims and objectives of the study, methodology and structure of the dissertation. Next an industry overview provides background information about the translation industry and the importance of Relationship Marketing in this sector as well as company information on Betterlanguages.com Ltd. The literature review commences with the introduction of Relationship Marketing and its shift from transactional marketing and contains an academic literature review on previous scholarly research on Relationship Marketing, including the important elements in maintaining long-term relationships in business-to-business markets and the relationship development process. Following this Chapter four presents the research methodology providing a detailed discussion of the theoretical background for the research methodology adopted and explains the rationale for the particular techniques used for the data collection and the method of analysis employed. The findings and discussion chapter presents analysis of the data collected as part of the case study of Betterlanguages.com Ltd. The data from participant observation and interviews will be discussed by the researcher to in order to answer the research objectives of the study. The final chapter ends the dissertation by drawing conclusion and recommendations; it also discusses the limitations of the research, as well as stating suggestions for future study.

2.0 Industry Overview

In order to discuss Relationship Marketing in the case of Betterlanguages.com Ltd first it is necessary to gain an understanding of the translation industry itself. Therefore this chapter provides a brief overview of the translation industry in order to ground the research environment of this case study. It explores the current trends in the industry as well as providing background information on the company itself.

2.1 Overview of the translation industry

Market research by the Common Sense Advisory values the global translation industry at 17 billion USD in 2010 (Kelly and Stewart 2010). The global translation services market is highly fragmented as 'the largest five companies account for less than 5% of the worldwide market and there are literally thousands of extremely small companies and individuals offering different types of translation services around the world, often in a very limited geographic area' (Holland *et al.* 2004, p.254). As a result of globalisation and the growth of multinational companies there is an increasing need for firms to market their products and services in various target languages, particularly by translating their websites (Nagy 2003; Holland *et al.* 2004). Moreover, the growth of the internet has provided even the smallest of companies with a means of reaching an expanded customer base potentially across the globe. Of course in order to target a foreign market, as well as understanding the customers' potential needs, the customers need to clearly understand the firm's product/service offering, thus all companies across various industries need to ensure the information they provide is available in the native target language, as well as being translated clearly and effectively (Nagy 2003).

More recently, the growth of various technologies have changed the way in which the translation industry operates (Nagy 2003). Notably the rise in the use of computer assisted translation (CAT) since the 1990s. There are two kinds of CAT; human-aided machine translation and machine-aided human translation. In the former the translation is carried out by the computer but translators are required to check the translation for specific language issues such as cultural nuances and grammatical inaccuracies. Whereas, machine-aided human translation is carried out by a human and technology serves to help the translator in this process (Christensen and Scholdjager 2010). Machine-aided human translation which typically involves creating 'translation memory', a database of source texts which translators can use when creating new translations on the same topic matter in order to ensure consistency (Somers 2003). The advantages of translation memory are the apparent cost savings in ensuring that work is not repeated unnecessarily and to maintain quality and continuity (Lagoudaki 2006; O'Hagan 2009; Christensen and Scholdjager 2010). Furthermore there has been increasing publicity surrounding the use of the web to provide translations, particularly on the rise of 'Google Translate' which uses Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) (Lee 2010). Instead of following word-based literal translation this method uses statistical methods and algorithms to generate translation (Och and Ney 2004; Lee 2010). This method can be seen as a relatively cheap alternative to hiring a translation company or LSP (Language Service Provider) although the translation provided is often of a lower quality and dramatically less accurate than that provided by a human translator and for this reason regularly has to be post-edited (Specia and Farzindar 2010). Thus, the introduction of various technologies can be seen as more cost efficient but this brings its own difficulties in terms of translation quality. This is particularly evident in the use of 'crowdsourcing' translation whereby translation is outsourced to a group of native speakers in order to generate comparable data, but once again, this is heavily criticised to be prone to resultant inaccurate translations (Zaidan and Callison-Burch 2011).

As previously stated, the translation industry is highly fragmented and has a large proportion of smaller companies operating as well as larger corporations. There has been a trend for companies to seek to expand in order to become more 'corporate'. Moreover, larger companies are seen to reap benefits such as offering a wider range of services and having in-house proofing teams (Nagy 2003). The attraction of this is that clients have greater confidence in the firm's reputation but this however, may be misleading and clients are left to evaluate whether such companies will understand their independent translation needs and maintain a consistent high quality of work (Nagy 2003).

The choice of translation specialism is another issue facing LSPs. Agencies typically decide to specialise either on one language, multiple languages or in a specific technical field. Thus they choose whether to operate in a niche market of one language or in a technical field or to be more diverse in their product offering. The difficulty is choosing which strategy to adopt when clients have multiple translation requirements, which vary in size and complexity. Furthermore, clients' needs are not static and therefore they may request further types of translation forcing the translation agency to adapt its product offering further to include these extended services. Lastly if a firm chooses to focus on a specific language or specialism and then expands, companies may perceive difficulties in gaining recognition in these new areas.

2.2 Betterlanguages.com Ltd: A background

Next it is necessary to provide some background information on the company itself. Betterlanguages.com Ltd is a small translation agency based in Bingham, Nottingham. It was founded in 1993 and the current CEO Mike Hunter joined the company in 2000. It is a web-based translation agency that currently specialises in clothing care labels and packaging translation although it provides a variety of other translation services in numerous languages. There are currently four full time members of staff that work for Betterlanguages.com Ltd including two 'TM's (Translation Managers) and the CEO. They work with a network of translators to ensure a high quality, speed and flexible translation services (Betterlanguages.com Ltd 2011).

Betterlanguages.com Ltd currently operates in a niche market with several clients using their translation services for care labels, food labels and e-commerce sites. Their clients range in size from local retailers to an international clothing companies and a supermarket chain. The majority of work they undertake is done on a job-by-job basis but this is mostly generated through repeat business, which the CEO estimates as over 90% of their business (Hunter 2011).

Table 1 indicates a financial summary of Betterlanguages.com Ltd between the years 2008 and 2011.

TABLE 1 – BETTERLANGUAGES.COM LTD'S FINANCIAL INFORMATION 2008-2011 (HUNTER 2011)

	Net Turnover	Gross Profit	Net Profit Before Tax
2008	£88,160	£67,134	£35,935
2009	£217,766	£135,236	£98,656
2010	£283,599	£188,955	£124,700
2011	£156,728	£116,590	£30,220

This shows that the company has experienced rapid growth over the past four years. During the financial year 2009-2010 the company had many single one-off projects that were high in value. However, as data shows Betterlanguages.com Ltd is very vulnerable to significant changes in profit due to dealings with larger clients. Predominantly the loss of larger contracts is responsible for the decrease in net profit before tax in 2011 and well as the fact that the company provided many high value quotations for clients, but several companies did not go ahead with these (Hunter 2011).

2.3 SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed the characteristics of the translation industry as well as the major trends facing its development. It has provided background to the company Betterlanguages.com Ltd by situating the agency in its contextual environment and exploring its current growth, aims and offerings.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews existing research conducted on the field of Relationship Marketing. It begins with the roots of Relationship Marketing, its growth and research directions through the years. The following section examines a discussion of the plethora of definitions that have been written upon it. This is followed by the exploration of the current debate as to whether Relationship Marketing constitutes a paradigm shift. This leads on to the exploration of Relationship Marketing's role in CRM. Next the review discusses the concept of relationship constructs that constitute successful business relationships. Then the focus will turn to reviewing existing models of the development of business relationships in services marketing and in B2B marketing.

3.1 ROOTS OF RELATIONSHIP MARKETING: SHIFT FROM TRANSACTIONAL MARKETING

Transactional marketing has dominated marketing theory for more than four decades but now scholars recognise there has been a shift from the traditional marketing mix paradigm to Relationship Marketing (Grönroos 1997). Mainstream marketing literature until recently has been criticised by a large number of scholars for neglecting long-term relationships with customers and other stakeholders. Thus, the neglect of long term relationships became a focal point in marketing research (Dwyer *et al.* , 1987; Håkansson, 1982; Christopher *et al.* , 1991; Ford, 1990; Grönroos, 1994b; Möller 1992, 1994; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Gummesson, 1997; Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995a, Parvatiyar and Sheth, 1997;).

In order to discuss the roots of Relationship Marketing first it is necessary to consider transactional marketing. Transactional marketing was long considered the dominant paradigm in marketing since the 1960s (Berry 1983, Jackson 1985, Gummesson 1987; Payne 1995; Aijo 1996, Ravald and Grönroos 1996). The origins of transactional marketing can be traced back to North America and theories of microeconomics in the 1950s (Harker and Egan 2006). Borden (1964) developed the 'marketing-mix' theory which consisted of twelve variables for marketers to consider when developing an integrated marketing program. This in turn, was built upon by

McCarthy (1960) who restructured Borden's variables into the infamous '4Ps framework', which was created as a universal marketing theory. However, researchers immediately began to question the validity of the framework across various marketing disciplines. The criticism of the '4Ps' grew as it was accused of lacking generalisability due to the highly specific context in which it was developed, as well as its inability to be applied to services and industrial marketing (Berry and Parasuraman 1993; Fisk *et al.* 1993; Bitner 1995). In order to address these shortcomings scholars suggested further 'P's in order to broaden the application of the theory. However, academics questioned these adaptations as they were considered an attempt to justify a view that no longer could be considered a universal theory of marketing (Harker and Egan 2006).

It is useful to compare the perspectives of transactional marketing and Relationship Marketing in order to understand how marketing theory has shifted. Transactional marketing ideas were founded on market exchanges that were considered to be single one-off transactions (Fill and Fill 2005). The main focus of the firm using Transaction Marketing was delivering value through the sale of products. Therefore price was key for a firm to remain competitive. Whereas, Relationship Marketing assumes there will be further exchanges between buyer and seller, which determines a more long-term focus to transactions (Coviello and Brodie 1998). Customer service and interactions are vital to maintain mutually profitable relationships between buyers/service providers and customers. Several scholars highlight that firms are motivated by the interest in maintaining client relationships as these relationships have been found to be more profitable to maintain relationships rather than acquire new customers (Reichheld and Sasser 1990).

The disciplinary roots of Relationship Marketing are argued to have stemmed from services marketing, marketing channel and business marketing research traditions, the idea of database marketing and direct marketing as well as the development of technology (Möller and Halinen 2000). These various marketing perspectives have led to the development of different schools of thought regarding Relationship Marketing (Grönroos and Strandvik 1997). These encompass four broad groups of scholars; the Nordic School of Relationship Marketing; the Anglo-Australian school; the International (or Industrial) Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Group and North American scholars (Payne 1995).

The Nordic School approach regards managing services at the core of relationship building and maintenance (Grönroos, 2000). The Anglo-Australian school approach examines how quality and customer service can be integrated into marketing. Whereas, the International (or Industrial) Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Group studies industrial markets and the interactions between companies which are considered to occur not as isolated transactions but as a continual stream of interaction (Gummessonn 1987; Turnbull and Ford 1996). The IMP Group emphasise the importance of long-term relationships and adopt the 'interaction approach' whereby buyers and sellers are active participants in the market (Håkansson and Snehota 2000). The North American School focuses on both service and industrial marketing.

3.2 Definition of Relationship Marketing

In addition to the divide of scholarly interest, there is yet to be a definitive definition of Relationship Marketing. Berry was the first to explicitly define Relationship Marketing as "attracting, maintaining and – in multi-service organisations – enhancing customer relationships" (1983, p.25).

One of the most frequently referred to definition by scholars of Relationship Marketing is that of Gummesson (1991) who states "establishing a relationship involves giving promises, maintaining a relationship is based on fulfilment of promises; and, finally, enhancing a relationship means that a new set of promises is given with the fulfilment of earlier promises as a prerequisite" (1991, p.62). Grönroos further develops Gummesson's (1991) definition of the aim of Relationship Marketing, which he argues is to "identify and establish, maintain and enhance and, where necessary terminate, relationships with customers and other stakeholders, at a profit, so that the objectives of all parties involved are met; and this is done by mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises" (Grönroos 1994b, p.438). This emphasises the importance of relationships beyond the customer-supplier dyad.

Similar definitions as that proposed by Berry (1983) were proposed by marketers in business-to-business marketing. The concept that relationships could be managed and constructed became a corner stone of the Nordic and the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) School of marketing (Harker and Egan, 2006). Egan (2008, p.276) contends that there are indeed "two, perhaps irreconcilable, camps of researchers". Thus, a 'schism' has developed between those who conceive marketing from a broad and pluralistic orientation and those who take a narrower functional marketing perspective. "In effect ideas are polarising between those who continue to support the holistic, multi-relationship, definition of Relationship Marketing and those whose focus is solely concerned with the 'customer-supplier dyad" (Egan 2008, p.276). In simplified terms there is a divide between those who apply a Broad definition with a narrow application or, in contrast, apply a narrower definition of Relationship Marketing with broader application.

Furthermore, as there is little synthesis on the term 'Relationship Marketing' and how it should be applied there is confusion as to which definition to use and how to approach its application. Sheth and Parvatiyar (2000, p.121) suggest the scope of Relationship Marketing is wide enough to cover the entire spectrum of marketing's sub-disciplines including "channels, business-to-business marketing, services marketing, marketing research, customer behaviour, marketing communications, marketing strategy, international marketing and direct marketing". Due to the potentially broad application of Relationship Marketing other researchers have contended that it is often applied in the wrong context in marketing research.

3.3 A NEW MARKETING PARADIGM?

There has been great debate amongst marketing scholars as to whether Relationship Marketing constitutes a completely new phenomenon. "During the last decade of the twentieth century Relationship Marketing was probably the major trend in marketing and certainly the major (and arguably the most controversial) talking point in business management" (Egan 2008).

On one hand, Relationship Marketing has been presented as new approach to marketing management (Berry and Parasuraman 1991; Christopher *et al.* , 1991; Payne 1995). It has been heralded as a 'new' marketing paradigm (Grönroos 1994a; Kotler 1997; Gummesson 1999, 2001) as well as 'paradigm shift' (Sheth and Parvatiyar 1993; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Grönroos 1994b; Brodie *et al.* 1997; Buttle 1997; Gummesson 1997).

On the other hand, others contest the extent to which the objectives of Relationship Marketing have always been of value and indeed, if this is merely an attempt to rejuvenate a previously established concept. Relationship Marketing has received significant criticism from scholars and has even been referred to as the 'emperor's new clothes' (Gummesson 1997, p.53). It is argued that Relationship Marketing represents a fragmented set of ideas and theoretical frameworks, which results in authors such as Gummesson (1996), Iacobucci (1994) and Lehtinen (1996) calling for a synthesis. Consequently, Relationship Marketing has been accused of being characterised more by "rhetoric than by rigorous examination of what the concept involves" (Möller and Halinen 2000, p.30). One particularly harsh critic of Relationship Marketing is Brown, who contends that the supposed Relationship Marketing paradigm shift is nothing more than 'retro-marketing scholarship' (Brown 1999 p.379). Egan (2008, p.262) contends that Brown's criticism although ''scathing' is not without justification' as other scholars consider Relationship Marketing to be a rediscovery of long-held marketing practices (Payne 2000) or a return to pre-industrial era practices (Sheth and Parvatiyar 2000). This is reiterated by Bruhn (2003) who suggests Relationship Marketing is merely an extension of the old marketing concept. Critics of Relationship Marketing call it nothing more than a marketing 'makeover' (Brown 1998, Palmer, 1996). Thus the idea that it perhaps nothing more than a 'management fad' (Micklethwait and Woolridge 1996) or a new buzzword for marketers has been suggested by several scholars, as indeed "marketing [is] prone to this flavour of the month syndrome" (Payne *et al.* 1995, p.vii)..

In response to such strong criticism, other scholars suggest that whilst Relationship Marketing may not be an entirely new marketing concept it has served to highlight importance of relationships when marketing in the modern environment. Relationship Marketing can therefore be seen as a fresh approach to marketing, one that puts relationships at the centre of marketing activities (Fill and Fill 2005). Along these lines Sheth and Parvatiyar (2000) argue that the biggest achievement of Relationship Marketing has been its ability to bring relationships back to the forefront of marketing. They claim that Relationship Marketing has the potential to "become a well-respected, freestanding and distinct discipline in marketing" (Sheth and Parvatiyar 2000, p.123).

3.4 Relational marketing continuum

The relational view of marketing as discussed has evolved from traditional marketing practices such as Transactional Marketing. Therefore scholars have drawn attention to the need for conceptualising contemporary marketing practices so authors such as Berry (1995) and Webster (1992) have outlined a continuum of relationship fostering practices (Coviello *et al.* 2002). There is a division of scholars as to whether marketing strategy is determined by firm type and indeed, whether Relationship Marketing can be applied to all organizations (Coviello *et al.* 2002). Some scholars such as Grönroos (1991) argue that certain approaches are appropriate to certain types of firms, for example consumer durable and industrial goods firms are likely to adopt more relational practices than transactional ones. From this, Coviello *et al.* (2002) have developed a framework that considers Transaction Marketing and relational marketing at opposite ends of a continuum, and made up by four aspects of marketing; Transaction Marketing, database marketing, interaction marketing and network marketing. The latter three types of marketing are all considered to be relational forms of marketing so these will be discussed further.

3.4.1 Database marketing

This type of marketing can be defined as “using technology-based tools to target and retain customers” (Coviello *et al.* 2002, p.34). This strategy offers a formal exchange approach, which allows the firm to target individual customer segments. The focus of this type of marketing is broadly on customer retention and to decrease customer risk (Coviello, Brodie and Munro 1997). Managerial investment is aimed on internal marketing assets such as information and technology capabilities (Coviello *et al.* 1997). More sophisticated database marketing systems are based on the extensive collection of customer data (Lewington *et al.* 1996) and can be used to develop a ‘memory’ of the relationship (Blattbery and Deighton 1991). As cited in Lewington *et al.* (1996) the common benefits of database marketing are the amelioration of accuracy in marketing segmentation (Ventresca 1991), the ease of market modelling through online market research and increased ability to monitor marketing plan performance (Bruns and McFarlan 1987).

3.4.2 Interaction marketing

In contrast, interaction marketing’s purpose is “developing interpersonal relationships to create cooperative interaction between buyers and sellers for mutual benefit” (Coviello *et al.* 2002, p.34). Communication is on an individual face-to-face level based on high levels of commitment and trust. Such marketing has a longer lasting goal to foster mutual beneficial relationships and maintain these over time. Thus the focus of managerial investment is on external market assets, developing relationships with individuals (Coviello *et al.* 1997).

3.4.3 Network marketing

Similarly to interaction marketing, network marketing relies on creating relationships but between firms rather than individuals. Coviello *et al.* (2002, p.34) define network marketing as “developing interfirm relationships to allow for coordination of activities among multiple parties for mutual benefit, resource exchange, and so forth”. Network marketing may involve formal or informal exchanges to encourage coordination amongst firms (Coviello *et al.* 1997).

3.5 Customer Relationship Management

It would be impossible to discuss Relationship Marketing without including a discussion of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). In recent years CRM has become popular as it is seen as the IT solution to relational marketing. CRM is defined as a business strategy;

> "that integrates internal processes and functions, and external networks, to create and deliver value to targeted customers at a profit. It is grounded on high-quality customer data and enabled by IT" (Buttle, 1996, p.34).

Thus CRM aims to categorise customers segments, and hence implement customer-centric processes using customer data. CRM builds on the philosophy of Relationship Marketing that aims to create, develop and enhance relationships with careful targeted customers to maximize customer value, corporate profitability and thus shareholder value (Gummesson 2002; Payne and Frow 2004). CRM has even been defined as 'technology enabled Relationship Marketing' (Ryals and Payne 2001) and as a result it has been given various applications. To IT firms CRM is used to describe software packages that automate customer information in the buying and selling process. Buttle (1996) describes three types of CRM application. First of all there is 'strategic' CRM that develops a customer-centric business culture. Secondly, 'operational CRM' which focuses on the automation of the customer-facing parts of businesses. Lastly, 'Analytical CRM' exploits customer data to enhance both customer and company value (Buttle 1996). It is analytical CRM that is referred to most often when discussing CRM as firms use technology to organise and build up customer data, which is then stored on a data base so that customers differentiated which can used as a means of segmentation. Through such use of technology to organise customers, companies are able to identify customer buying patterns, habits and choices to inform their marketing decisions to suit such patterns. They also able to hold vast amounts of information on clients, which can lead to the identification of loss-making clients as well as inefficient modes of service delivery and communication.

3.6 The Business Relationship Concepts

A substantial amount of research has been carried out on buyer-seller relationships in business markets (Eggert and Ulaga, 2000). Scholars have developed conceptual frameworks and integrated models to explore business-to-business interaction as well as the mechanisms of buyer seller relationships (Wilson 1995). Furthermore, scholars have identified several relationship constructs that are considered dominant underpinnings of successful relationships. Wilson (2003) suggests that there are thirteen relationship constructs crucial to relationship building but these will all vary across various industries and in specific firms within industries. He considers trust, commitment, cooperation, mutual goals, interdependence, performance satisfaction, adaptation, social bonds, summative constructs, structural bonds, non-retrievable investments, comparison level of alternatives and shared technology as all equally important in the maintenance of successful business relationships (O'Malley and Tynan, 2000). The majority of studies on relationship characteristics identify trust, commitment and satisfaction as crucial elements of business relationships. In addition scholars examine 'relationship quality' most commonly through a combination of the aforementioned relationship constructs, although the combination of variables depends on the research specific context (Ulaga and Eggert, 2006).

3.6.1 Trust

As the mutual goal of supplier and customer is to promote close relationships with one another this creates a sense of commitment between both sides, thus focusing both parties on the attainment of trust (Gounaris, 2005). The vast majority of literature on Relationship Marketing examines the concept of trust (Dywer et al, 1987; Anderson and Narus 1990; Kwon and Suh 2004; Mohr and Spekman 1994; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Ganesan 1994; Wilson 1994; Doney and Cannon 1997; Smeltzer 1997;). Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust theory of Relationship Marketing identifies trust as a 'key mediating variable' of relational exchanges (1994, p.22). Trust is defined as "existing when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity" (Morgan and Hunt 1994, p.23). Thus to establish a strong relationship, the intentions of both partners must not be in doubt and there must be honest, open and frequent communication (Berry, 1995). Scholars such as Anderson and Narus (1990) focus on the perceived outcomes of interaction which define trust as "the firm's belief that another company will perform actions that will result in positive outcomes for the firm as well as not take unexpected actions that result in negative outcomes" (1990, p.45). Trust has been considered central to research conducted by the IMP Group (Ford 1990) and is highly connected to loyalty (Schurr and Ozanne 1985). Furthermore, it is argued that in a business-to-business context trust is associated with the customer reducing risk by selecting a supplier who has perceived credibility and benevolence (Doney and Cannon 1997). According to Doney and Cannon (1997) customers seek suppliers that perform reliably (credibility) and they demonstrate interest in the partner's welfare (Ulaga and Eggert 2006).

2.6.2 Commitment

In addition to trust, commitment is another relationship construct that has drawn high levels of scholarly attention (Gundlach, Achrol and Mentzer, 1995). There have been several examinations of the level of relationship commitment in long term relationships carried out by researchers (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987; Achrol, Scheer and Stern 1990; Anderson and Weitz, 1992; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpandé (1992, p.316) contend that "commitment to the relationship is defined as an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship". This is reiterated by Morgan and Hunt (1994) who suggest commitment rests on believing that the on going relationship between exchange partners warrants maximum efforts to maintain it indefinitely. Therefore commitment is a central premise to relational exchange and indeed, can be seen to represent the highest stage of relational bonding (Dwyer *et al.* 1987). As Berry and Parasuraman (1991, p.139) explain "relationships are built on the foundation of mutual commitment. Commitment stabilises a relationships as customers are unlikely to switch suppliers even if given another viable offer by other suppliers (Ulaga and Eggert 2006). Commitment is argued to be associated with motivation and involvement, loyalty and performance and obedience to organisational policies (Gundlach *et al.* 1995).

One approach to commitment is to model the organization's commitment in terms of employees commitment to the organization (Garbarino and Johnson 1999). This can be argued to demonstrate the reliability of employees to the firm and thus the perceived commitment they attach to the job, which in turn has been associated with higher levels of customer commitment.

3.6.3 Satisfaction

Another important aspect of business relationships is satisfaction, particularly when discussed in terms of customer retention (Hennig-Thurau and Klee 1997). It is important to distinguish between 'overall satisfaction' and 'transaction-specific customer satisfaction' (Garbarino and Johnson 1999). The latter is concerned with the post-purchase evaluation or reaction of a customer after a specific transaction. Whereas, 'overall satisfaction' is when consumers evaluate their cumulative purchase and consumption experience with a good or service. This is demonstrated in Parasuraman *et al.* 's (1988) paradigm that satisfaction is a result of the comparison of perceived performance and customer comparison standards (Ulaga and Eggert 2006). This overall satisfaction is important in supplier-customer relationships as satisfaction can lead to repeat transaction or equally, further recommendations (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000).

Another aspect related to satisfaction is that of customer experience. The decision for a relationship to continue hinges on the consistency between expectations and performance in business dealings (Conway and Swift 2000; Levitt 1983). Therefore a negative experience may prevent further transactions between companies as experience greatly influences satisfaction (Buchanan and Gilles 1990).

3.6.4 Relationship dependence

The establishment of trust and commitment between firms results in a certain level of relationship dependence (Fung, Chen and Yip 2007). Once a firm has developed mutual commitment to other firms they must attain and increase mutual trust as this results in the interdependence of firm activities. This dependence can be seen as a requirement needed to maintain a relationship in order to achieve desired, often, mutual goals (Frazier 1983). Holm *et* *al.* (1999) suggest that this mutual dependence results in value creation and thus growth through interdependent activities that would not have been possible without the initial business relationship.

3.6.5 Communication

Communication can be defined as "the process of establishing a commonness or oneness of thought between a sender and a receiver" (Shramm, 1954, p.3). Communication is an intrinsic component of relationship development but is often assumed and therefore frequently forgotten about when discussing relationship variables (Conway and Swift 2000). Therefore several scholars focus on the importance of communication within Relationship Marketing (Anderson and Weitz 1989, Frazier and Rody 1991) and Selnes (1998) in particular suggests that communication is an intrinsic element in its own right but also has the potential to influence other relationship variables such as trust. Thus, the two-way flow of communication is essential in business relationships as the communicator needs to ensure that his or her message has been understand and therefore feedback is deemed indispensible (Conway and Swift 2000). Furthermore, adopting a personal approach to selling can aid in better understanding client and engaging in a social dialogue (Bruhn 2003).

3.7 Social Media

With the growth of technology, the internet has given rise to growing popularity of social media (Trusov *et al.* 2009). "Typical social networking sites allow a user to build and maintain a network of friends for social or professional interaction" (Trusov *et al.* 2009, p. 92). It is argued by authors such as Bradshaw and Brash (2001, p.520) that the use of social media falls under Customer Relationship Management in businesses, as it "…enables organisations to identify, attract and increase retention of profitable customers, by managing relationships with them". This management of the relationship between the business and its customers reinforces the customer's decision to continue purchasing products or services from them. Pfeiffer *et al.* (2010, p.47) also argue "to build brand strength or to actively convey a brand's positioning relative to competitors toward a broad audience, however, classic advertising remains a necessity." So a mixture of both new and traditional marketing channels is the argued to be the most effective.

It is important to question the context in which social media is used when considering its effective employment. The definition of social media is critical when trying to understand its uses within a business. As Ahlqvist et al (2010, p.4) assert: "…social media is built on three key elements: content, communities and Web 2.0…" they also use a functional definition: "social media refers to the interaction of people and also to creating, sharing, exchanging and commenting contents in virtual communities and networks" (2010, p.4). This describes some of the fundamental building blocks for social media; Fischer and Reuber (2010, p.2) clarify social media types:

> "There is no definitive typology of different sorts of social media (see for example Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), but it is common to differentiate between social networking (e.g. Facebook), social bookmarking (e.g. Digg), video-sharing (e.g. YouTube), picture-sharing (e.g. Flickr), professional networking (e.g. LinkedIn), user forums, weblogs (or blogs), and micro blogging (e.g. Twitter)."

Interactions are vital for all of these sites, therefore businesses with the use of social media are able to network and communicate with customers and other stakeholders across the globe.

3.8 Reputation

Corporate reputation is "conceived of as a perceptual representation of the firm's overall appeal when compared with other rivals" (Hanson, Samuelson and Silseth 2008, p.208). A good reputation can be considered an asset to the owner (Hanson *et al.* 2008) as well as a source of competitive advantage (Ganesan 1994). Furthermore reputation is highly associated with trust, and therefore a negative reputation will incur lower levels of trust (Anderson and Weitz 1989) so it is vital that companies maintain a positive reputation among clients. This can be seen as important for two reasons. Firstly, when a company faces difficulties in assessing firm performance they may choose to compare firm reputation to aid in assisting their purchase judgements (Hanson *et al.* 2008). Secondly, in regards to transaction cost economics, firms with positive reputation reduce the need for customers to allocate resources towards safeguarding and monitoring costs (Rindfleisch and Heide 1997).

3.10 Relationship Marketing in Business-Business Marketing

Business-to-Business marketing is "concerned with the marketing of goods and services to organizations. The key distinguishing feature of business marketing is the nature of the customer, rather than the nature of the product" (Brennan *et al.* 2011, p.22). Thus business-to-business marketing encompasses various forms of exchange including partnerships and strategic alliances. Therefore Business-to-Business markets greatly differ to consumer markets Kotler 1997). Furthermore the aim of Business-to-business marketing can be seen as developing mutually profitable relationships (Gounaris, 2005).

3.11 Relationship Development models

With the shift in focus from the exchange of products towards building customer relationships there has been considerable scholarly interest in relationship development. As Halinen (1997) contends that despite increasing research in long-term relationships, research to date has "broadly neglected the study of relationship dynamics" (1997, p.2) and with the "exception of industrial and international marketing, empirical enquiries into the development of buyer-seller relationships have been rare" (1997, p.2). Traditional marketing theory fails to address industrial and service B2B marketing where maintaining long-term relationships with customers is critical to organisational success (Payne 1995), particularly relationship development is neglected by researchers in services marketing (Halinen 1997). The are few existing empirical inquiries into relationship development within a service context such as (Gummesson 1979) and Grönroos (1980, 1982). However these authors typically investigate antecedents and consequences of development (Halinen 1997).

The majority of studies on business relationships have focused on the initiation of business relationships (Nevin, 1995) Significant research has been conducted in this field of business-to-business marketing by scholars in the IMP Group who focus on supplier and buyer relationship using an interaction approach. However, areas such as the development of relationships and retention have been largely neglected in Relationship Marketing models and frameworks (Halinen 1997).

One model that examines relationship development is proposed by Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987). They explain that a relationship evolves through five stages; awareness, exploration, expansion, commitment and dissolution. The first phases occurs when parties recognize the feasibility of the other as an exchange partner. The next phase exploration includes attraction, communication and attempts by each to bargain and to understand the nature of power, norm development and expectations held by one another. The third stage of expansion is "the continual increase in benefits obtained by the exchange partners and to their increasing independence" (Dywer *et al.* 1987, p.18). The commitment stage refers to the partners pledge to continue the relational exchange. The final stage dissolution, which may occur at any time in relationship development, occurs when the parties disengage from the exchange.

In addition to the model proposed by Dwyer *et al.* (1987) Ford (1990) proposed a similar model. He proposed five stages, pre-relationship stage, early stage, development stage, long-term stage, and final stage (Ford 1990). This model analysed the process of relationship development over time by considering the variables of experience, distance, commitment and adaptations.

3.12 SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed the roots of Relationship Marketing and its shift from transactional marketing. It has examined the various definitions of Relationship Marketing and discussed various definitions. In addition the debate of the extent to which Relationship Marketing constitutes a paradigm shift, or indeed does not constitute a shift has been critically evaluated. A *brief summary of Relationship Marketing's role in CRM is put forward before relationship constructs are discussed. Five relationship constructs, trust, commitment, satisfaction, relationship dependence and communication are reviewed from previous literature. This leads on the examination of the role of corporate reputation and its place within Relationship Marketing. Finally this chapter examines the various models of relationship development.*

4.0 Methodology

The following chapter identifies and justifies the choice of methods chosen for gathering and analysing data in this research project. Firstly it discusses the advantages and disadvantages for each of the qualitative strategy chosen and justifies the reason for their selection. Next it will describe the procedure of case selection as well as the research process. Then the chapter outlines the data collection methods used and the procedure of data analysis. Finally, this chapter considers the reliability and validity of the case study strategy.

4.1 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this dissertation is to develop an understanding into the key relationship constructs valid in Betterlanguages.com Ltd's client relationships and in particular to focus on relationship development and customer retention. In this case study, one task was to compare and contrast the various client relationships maintained by Betterlanguages.com Ltd, and discuss their theoretical underpinnings and development process in order to draw comparisons to existing literature on relationship constructs. By exploring where and why relationship development differs, if at all, it is hoped that a clearer understanding of maintaining relations will be identified.

Thus the objectives of this study are twofold; firstly, to examine the relationships between a particular B2B service provider and their clients, with a focus on how relationships are developed and maintained. Secondly, to recommend Relationship Marketing strategies through which customers' relationships can be strengthened and customers retained in the long run by Betterlanguages.com Ltd, and other B2B service firms. Therefore, the potential contribution of this research is to gain academic and managerial understanding of B2B client-service firm relationships, and to explore how such firms might promote and maintain relationships with clients

4.2 Research Paradigm

Before research can be carried out it is necessary to reflect on the philosophy of the research design. The reasons for this being it can help to clarify and adapt the research design as well as permitting the identification of feasible research designs (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe 1991). In terms of epistemology this thesis will adopt a phenomenological approach. Whilst positivism is concerned with the idea that "the social world exists externally and that its properties should be measured through objective measures" (Easterby *et al.* 1991, p.22) phenomenology stipulates "reality is socially constructed [...] one should therefore try to explain why people have different experiences, rather than search for external causes and fundamental laws to explain their behaviours" (Easterby *et al.* 1991, p.24). The adoption of a case study strategy lends itself to the phenomenological aim of examining the phenomena in its natural environment (Patton 1980). Further to this it is also an appropriate choice for this thesis as the phenomenological paradigm is often associated with qualitative research, and has strengths in understanding peoples' meaning, adapting to new issues as they emerge and contributing to theory generation (Easterby *et al.* 1991).

There are two approaches to theory building; these are deductive theory testing and inductive theory building (Bonoma, 1985; Romano, 1989; Parkhe, 1993). This thesis will adopt an inductive approach, this means that the researcher will first gather the empirical data and then use this to form theory (Bryman and Bell 2011).

Next the researcher must decide whether to employ qualitative or quantitative research methods. Qualitative research is typically described as highly descriptive (Gephart, 2004) and can be used to capture the qualities of naturally occurring processes and meanings (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). In addition to this, qualitative research studies naturally occurring phenomena and the social actors' understanding of these phenomena, thus it studies how "social experience is created and given meaning (Gephart 2004, p.455). It is perhaps most useful to gain an understanding of qualitative research by comparing it to quantitative research. Quantitative research is associated with "emphasis[ing] measurement and analysis of causal relations among variables" (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p.8) whereas qualitative research is deemed more interpretative. Thus qualitative research was selected in this thesis to better understand the social interactions, meanings and processes that constitute real-life phenomena.

4.3 The Case Study

The case study is a commonly used and popular method of conducting business research (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). It is distinctive from other research designs in that it focuses "on a bounded situation or system, an entity with a purpose or functioning parts" (Bryman and Bell 2011, p.60). Case studies are usually referred to as a research strategy rather than methodology (Eisenhardt, 1989) and can comprise of variety of methods and methodologies (Piekkari and Welch 2011). "A case study is a research strategy (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin, 2009) an approach to research which you have to design, and through which you use a range of research methods (secondary-data methods included) and analyses in an attempt to answer the research question" (Cameron and Price 2009, p.301). They are the preferred strategy when the researcher poses 'how' or 'why' questions, when the researcher has little control over events and when the focus of the study is on a contemporary phenomenon (Yin 2009, p.2). In addition, case descriptions can frequently provide astute understanding into the phenomenon being study and can therefore lead to the formulation of a hypothesis which can in turn be investigated (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin, 2009). Therefore, case study research entails "a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of phenomena within their context" (Hartley 2004). Context is highly important when conducting a case study as this research method aims to analyse the context and processes which illuminate the research issues being discussed (Hartley 2004).

There are three different types of case studies used for research purposes. These are explanatory or causal studies, descriptive case studies and exploratory case studies (Yin 2009). As there has been considerable research conducted on business relationships (Litler and Tynan 2005) the appropriate development of theory would classify this case study as descriptive case study (Yin 2009). This is the most applicable type of case study as the research attempts to deploy a descriptive effort to explain relationship characteristics relevant to the case of betterlanguages.com Ltd using existing theories as models as a guide.

In order to carry out a valid and reliable case study the researcher must be aware of the different methods of collecting and analysing empirical evidence and each methods' possible associated advantages and disadvantages. One of the main strengths of a case study is that it can be widely employed across various research disciplines and allows the investigator 'to retain the meaningful and holistic characteristics that occur in real-life events' (Yin 2009, p.4). Thus it can be used to achieve various aims which include; provide descriptions of phenomena, develop theory, and test theory (Darke, Shanks and Broadbent 1998).

> "The use of case study research to test theory requires the specification of theoretical propositions derived from an existing theory. The results of case study data collection and analysis are used to compare the case study findings with the expected outcomes predicted by the propositions (Cavaye, 1996). The theory is either validated or else found to be inadequate in some way, and may then be further refined on the basis of the case study findings" (Darke, Shanks and Broadbent, 1988, p.275).

As with all research methods, there is considerable criticism of the case study methods and the researcher must be aware of this before attempting to conduct a study. First and foremost case studies have been accused of lacking academic rigour (Yin 2009) and it is for this reason that qualitative researchers are concerned with testing the case study for reliability and validity as this provides confidence in the data collected as well as the successful application of result to generate theories and provide managerial insight. Furthermore, there has been cause for concern over the ability to accurately scientifically generalise a case study. Moreover, case studies present a long and timely process that if often said to result in lengthy unclear documents. Lastly case studies as well as other non-experimental methods when compared to experimental methods cannot directly address the issue of causal relationships. In addition to these general criticisms of a case study, embedded case designs can also be criticised as the researcher often fails to return to the larger unit of analysis instead focusing on sub-units of analysis (Yin 2009).

Using Yin's (2009) typology this case study would be classified as an embedded single case design with descriptive, exploratory and explanatory elements. It is an embedded because it has multiple elements (various business relationships) but remains a single case as it investigates one case – that of Betterlanguages.com Ltd. It was descriptive in the sense that it documented the development of business relationships, exploratory in the sense that it was not known if relationships of a translation agency would deviate from previous studies.

Since the research setting is a single translation company, the analysis and findings of the research will be presented as a single-case study. Using the case study approach backed up by other qualitative research methods, Betterlanguages.com Ltd's relationships with clients will be critically analysed. The methods used in this case study will be participant observation, secondary data analysis and interviews. As this study involves more than one unit of analysis which can be considered 'embedded units' following Yin's (2009) typology it is classified as an embedded case study design (2009, p.50).

4.3 Data Collection

The use of data triangulation strengthens this study by combining multiple data sources (Patton, 2002). Thus, as a variety of data collection is employed by the researcher, the study is less prone to individual method errors and data can be cross-validated and checked for consistency (Patton 2002, Yin, 2009). The following section the various research methods employed in this case study shall be discussed.

4.3.1 Participant Observation

Ethnography can be defined as "a technique based on direct observation" (Gobo, 2011, p.16). There are two types of ethnographic research strategies, participant observation and non-participant observation. Participant Observation can be distinguished from non-participant observation in that the researcher interacts with the subjects as well as describing and observing their social actions (Spradley 1980; Gobo, 2011). Participant Observation is frequently employed when conducting research on organisations as it provides the research with insight in to the behaviour of employees and allows the researcher access to their current working environment and it is for this reason that "participant observation is exceptional for studying processes, relationships among people and events [...] as well as the immediate sociocultural contexts in which human existence unfolds" (Jorgensen 1989, p.12) In this study participant observation was carried out by the researcher frequently visiting the Betterlanguages.com Ltd's office in Bingham, Nottingham between the months of June to September 2011. In these visits the researcher made field notes on general observations of the staff and their actions as well as actively engaging in discussions and carrying out interviews. The researcher kept a log of "activities in the field, unique experiences and other matters of possible interest" (Jorgensen 1989, p.22). An extract of the researcher's notes from participant observation can be found in Appendix A.

4.3.2 Secondary Data Analysis

In order to supplement the primary research collected by the researcher, secondary data was also analysed. It was necessary to examine the translation industry in order to understand the specific business context in which Betterlanguages.com Ltd operates and to build up case study background information. In addition to this a literature search was conducted in order to establish the directions and concepts prevalent the field of Relationship Marketing. Secondary data analysis allows the research to gain an insight into what has already been written about the topic and offers a design on how the researcher may continue further research into that field (Heaton 2004). In order to do this academic journals, industry reports were accessed online and then evaluated in order to identify a potential research direction that required further study.

4.3.3 INTERVIEWS

Interviews are a widely employed method in business research (Cameron and Price 2004.) It is argued they can provide richer information and generate more in-depth responses than other forms of research such as questionnaires. Scholars such as Silverman (2011) describe interviews as a 'conversation with a particular purpose' but differentiate interviews from conversations as they call for a particular set of skills to be conducted reliably and successfully. One of the major concerns when conducting interviews is that they can be especially susceptible to bias and therefore need careful planning to ensure the generation of valid and reliable data (Cameron and Price 2004). However, when conducted successfully interviews can provide 'evidence of the nature of the phenomenon under observation, including the contexts and situations in which it emerges, as well as insights into the cultural frames people use to make sense of these experiences' (Miller and Glassner 2011, p.145).

There are several advantages when conducting interviews. If the questions are well structured and the sample is of a reasonable size the interview response can be regarded as valid information to support theoretical argument and development (Cameron and Price 2004). In addition interviewing offers a high degree of flexibility, the interviewer can probe for extra information on emerging topics and can adapt the interview to suit the interviewees' needs and willingness to share (King and Horricks 2009; Bryman and Bell 2011). Thus this method lends itself to a certain degree of interactivity which is not present in other methods as meaning and question can easily be expanded or clarified (King and Horricks 2009). Furthermore interviews from a constructionist perspective can be a prime of attributing meanings to what is being studied. As Kvale (1996 p.70) argues "the qualitative interview is a uniquely sensitive method for capturing the experiences and lived meaning for the subjects; everyday world. Interviews allow the subjects to convey to others their situation from their own perspective and their own words". Finally the illustrative quotations can be used to explain and support points of wider theory and render a case study more compelling to the reader (Silverman 2011).

Of course the interview as a research method is not without its disadvantages. They require a high level of skill and patience in their interpretation as analysing data from interviews (Kvale 1996). In order to conduct successful interviews the researcher must establish and maintain a rapport with the interviewee, at the same time as ensuring that they remain neutral and do interfere with the direction of the interview. Interviewing is highly time consuming and for this reason the sample size is often reduced. There remains the danger that interview is highly susceptible to interviewer's influence and thus can be accused of being led down a pre-determined path. Furthermore while unstructured and semi-structured interviews offer great scope of flexibility this may be a potential flaw in that it reduces the ability of the researcher to draw comparisons and thus make clear and concise conclusions. Lastly a common issue is that interviews can be criticised due to their susceptibility to misinterpretation, it is the researcher who must ensure that they are drawing fair conclusions from interviews not merely citing or interpreting views that support their arguments, thus lacking objectivity (Kvale 1996).

There are various ways in which to structure an interview. They can be unstructured, semi-structured and structured but it is also possible to mix structures (Berg 1989; Lincoln and Denzin 2011). Semi-structured covers a wide degree of structures, and therefore can to considered to fall somewhere between structured and unstructured interviews. They are 'semi-structured' in the sense that the interviewer does not have a standard set of questions to follow rigidly but instead often has an 'interview guide' (Kvale 1996) which is a list of interview topics to prompt and steer the conversation to insure all the intended topics are discussed (Cameron and Price 2004; King and Horricks 2009). This method was adopted in this project in order to allow a certain degree of flexibility but ensuring all intended avenues of questioning were followed.

A mixture of face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews were conducted in this research project. It was not possible to interview Betterlanguage.com Ltd's clients in person due to the fact that they are mainly international companies with offices based throughout the country. Therefore, telephone interviews were chosen to contact the geographically dispersed clients as telephone interviews that are semi-structured allow the researcher time and cost savings. In addition, phoning clients would generate higher responses than electronic or paper questionnaires, and allow the researcher greater flexibility. However, 'reduced social bandwidth' (no body language) may make it harder to establish rapport and trust and thus reduce the richness of the information deduced from these interviews. Telephone interviews tend to be more tiring than face-to-face so it is also often in the researcher's interest to keep these interviews shorter than otherwise desired (Price and Cameron, 2004). In contrast to this, as the researcher had direct access to Betterlanguages.com Ltd's office it was possible to conduct face-to-face interviews with three members of staff out of the four full-time employees. It is important to recognise the difference in the quality of response collected from the employees as they were already known to the research and a rapport had therefore been previously established. This meant that their interviews were 'richer' in data and inevitably longer as they were keen to participate to discover how their company interacted with others. See Appendices B and C for example interview transcripts.

4.3.4 Sampling

Sampling can be defined as "selecting some of the elements in a population, [so] we may draw conclusions about the entire population" (Cooper and Schindler 1998, p 179). By being selective in who to interview, the results can be more accurate, lower costs and increase speed of data collection. There are two types of sampling procedures: probability based and non-probability sampling. In this thesis non-probability sampling was used as the researcher used purposive sampling as it seeks information rich interviews which can be studied in depth (Patton 2002). Thus, in order to answer the research questions proposed in this study interviewees were selected by identified those who could offer rich responses as well as those who were current Betterlanguages.com Ltd's employees and clients. Four employees were interviewed in an informal face-to-face interviews at their office and a further five clients participated in this research through the use of telephone interviews.

4.4 Analysing the data

As previously discussed this study uses multiple sources of evidence were collected as part of the case study. These were client telephone interviews, employee interviews as well as general observation. Therefore the case description was based on the information from the responses of clients and employees to interviews as well and observations made by the researcher at the firm. In order to preserve confidentiality when conducting this research the researcher was asked by the firm to use alternative names for clients, so each client interviewed remained anonymous. Table 2 provides a description of the type of firms interviewed.

Table 2 Coded Client interviewees and descriptions

Company Pseudonym	Description
Company A	A manufacturer of children's furniture, carpets and educational equipment.
Company B	Global labelling manufacturer.
Company C	A small UK based manufacturer of craft kits
Company D	A food manufacturer.
Company E	A baby product retailer.

This study uses 'pattern matching' "whereby several pieces of information from the same case may be related to some theoretical proposition" (Pellissier 2007 p.27). Concepts previously identified from academic studies on relationships will be compared to concepts and characteristics that are prominent in the development of Betterlanguages.com Ltd's business relationships. In addition to pattern matching a second analytic tactic of 'explanation building' was employed, in fact a more complex type of pattern matching (Yin, 2009) as this is particularly relevant to the explanatory case study approach.

In order to use the pattern matching technique the interviews were coded which means that the researcher 'develop[ed] some manageable classification or coding scheme' (Patton, 2002 p463). In this study the method of 'thematic content analysis' (Grbich, 1999; Braun and Clarke 2006) was adopted which is an adaptation of Glaser and Strauss' 'grounded theory' approach as well as various works on content analysis (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Babbie 1979; Berg 1989). The core content of the interviews were analysed in order to ascertain which views and observations were deemed relevant to the research questions (Bryman and Burges 1994). Thus all the interviews were read to identify patterns or common 'categories' (Strauss 1987). The first step in the analytical process was to read through all the interviews and make notes on initial ideas and emerging concepts. Through these notes emerging themes are generated and the researcher becomes immersed in data analysis. The next stage is known as 'open coding' whereby various headings are recorded to describe the all aspects of content, even those which are irrelevant to the research questions. Following this the number of categories is reduced to include only the categories that are most relevant or 'higher-order' categories. Headings which overlap are combined thus producing a list of categories to which all the interview transcripts can be coded after all themes have been refined (Braun and Clarke 2006).

4.5 Reliability and Validity

In order to discuss the quality of a case study Yin (2009) suggests that one should examine whether the construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability of a case. It is important to test the validity and reliability of qualitative data to "determine the stability and quality of data collected" (Maxwell 2002; Riege 2003).

Construct validity can be defined as the identification of the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied (Yin 2009). A popular criticism of case studies is that the investigator fails to 'develop a sufficiently operational set of measures and that 'subjective' judgements are used to collect data' (Yin, 2009, p.41). Thus to increase the construct validity in this study, the researcher used multiple sources of evidence to encourage convergent lines of inquiry, established a chain of evidence and had a key informant review a draft of the case study report (Riege 2003).

Internal validity is “the extent to which variations in an outcome (dependent) variable can be attributed to controlled variation in an independent variable. A causal connection between the dependent and independent variable is normally assumed” (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p.290). In terms of internal validity there are two types of concern for the researcher. Firstly although not applicable here, there is the issue of causal relationships. Secondly there remains the wider issue of inference (Yin 2009). This is where the researcher typically infers the relation of a previously occurring event and must consider whether this has been correctly observed and if this affects the internal validity of the study. In order to counter this danger of inference the author conducted within case analysis and employed ‘pattern matching’ across the multiple sources of data (Riege 2003 and Yin 2009).

The third test of validity is external validity, which is concerned with the extent to which a case study is ‘transferable’ or in other words whether the findings can be generalised beyond the current case (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Riege 2003; Yin 2009). This issue has been a major concern and criticism of carrying out case studies. However, Yin (2009) stipulates this criticism is often submitted when contrasting case studies to surveys, which is an unfair comparison due to the fact that case studies rely on analytic generalisations rather than statistical generalisations. Analytical generalisations allow the investigator to “generalise a particular set of results to some broader theory” (Yin 2009, p.43) which is the type of generalisation this study attempts to employ.

Finally, one objective of case study research is that the investigator should be able to ensure that the case is reliable in terms of minimising errors and biases. In order to do this the study’s methodology must be clearly explained to ensure that if the study was to be carried out again, the new researcher would discover the same findings (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Yin 2009).

4.6 Summary

This chapter provides the justifications and methods for adopting a phenomenological *approach to carrying out a single embedded case study to discuss the development of Betterlanguages.com Ltd's business relationships. Multiple sources of evidence were collected as part of the case study including semi-structured interviews, participant observation as well as secondary data analysis, and all of these methods were analysed and justified. In order to interpret the findings a 'pattern matching' approach was adopted by the research and all data was then cross analysed to meet the aims and objectives of the thesis. Lastly factors relating to reliability and validity were discussed.*

5.0 Findings and Discussion

This chapter will present the findings of the case study based on the data collected through staff and client interviews as well as the data from participant observation. The data is presented under relevant themes and then further analysed. The key themes of communication, trust, the balance between price and quality, trust and long-lasting relationships were prominent in both sets of interviews as well as data collected from participant observation. In addition to the themes identified from all interviews, the client interviews further highlighted reputation, personalised service and satisfaction as further important aspects for developing business relationships. Thus, this chapter will focus on analysis of the data collected as part of the case study and will relate it back to the initial research questions to determine whether they can be answered.

5.1 The Importance of Building Long-term Relationships for Betterlanguages.com Ltd and Their Clients

It is clear from conducting this case study that maintaining and strengthening business relationships is of upmost importance to Betterlanguages.com Ltd and can be considered key to organisational success (Payne 1995). As a successful SME that is experiencing rapid growth they are very customer-orientated with 90% of their contracts comprised of repeat business. Therefore they seek to promote close relationships with clients (Gounaris 2005) who value the quality of their translation and potentially will return to them in the future. As two staff members comment,

"What we want to do to is to work with a client over a long period of time" (Employee A 2011).

"I tend to aim to build a relationship with a client" (Employee B 2011).

This affirms the importance of Relationship Marketing in the context of Betterlanguages.com Ltd which as a service B2B firm emphasises relationship building and management (Grönroos 1994a). All staff members interviewed regarded working closely with clients as essential in developing rapport, understanding and commitment. In addition to

Betterlanguages.com Ltd seeking long lasting business relationships it was demonstrated that clients shared this desire. One client who uses Betterlanguages.com Ltd as a supplier remarks,

> *"Once we form partnerships with businesses [...] those tend to be long lasting partnerships. We are not a business that keeps changing suppliers. We feel that our suppliers are just as important as our customers" (Company B 2011).*

Again, this is indicative that clients will seek to build relationships, as this is beneficial for both parties involved and eases day-to-day business interactions, this reinforces the ideas of Coviello *et al.* (1997). Drawing on (Coviello *et al.* 2002) three of the client interviewees shared this response explaining that they will continue to work with Betterlanguages.com Ltd as they have established a rapport and have developed a mutual understanding of each others' needs very well. One client even goes as far as to say they have worked with Betterlangauges.com Ltd for five to ten years and is not even aware of whether they offer a competitive price but will continue to work with them as they solve all her translation needs and are a pleasure to work with. This can be seen to be partially in line with Parasuraman *et al.* 's (1988) paradigm that suggests customer satisfaction depends on perceived performances, however this client can be seen to be unusual in that they did not perform a competitor's analysis. Overall, this demonstrates that Betterlanguages.com Ltd have a high rate of customer retention that can be seen to rest upon their interactive and personal approach when speaking to clients and ensuring customer satisfaction as identified by Henning-Thurau and Klee (1997).

5.2 Network Marketing

Whilst the firm was not directly asked about the type of marketing they employ, it was evident from participant observation that emphasised network marketing. For the company itself, developing a network of clients, either direct clients or suppliers to clients as well as a network of translators was extremely beneficial as highlighted by Coviello *et al.* (1997) as this was a means of not only strengthening the business relationships but also resulted in their recommendations by third parties.

As Bettlerlanguages.com Ltd specialises in certain types of translation, an aspect discussed in the industry overview, suppliers often recommended them to client companies. Furthermore, having an established network of translators means that specific translators can be matched to projects by their expertise and skill sets. This in turns permits the same translator to work on projects with particular clients to ensure that work is translated consistently. For clients, a network of businesses that they regularly interact with allows them to function efficiently with established contacts that are reliable and understanding of their business needs (Coviello *et al.* 2002).

5.2.1 The use of Social Media

Through participant observation the research was able to examine the scope of Betterlanguages.com Ltd network marketing through their use of social media. This relatively new method of communication with clients can be understood as 'the interaction of people and also to creating, sharing, exchanging and commenting contents in virtual communities and networks' (Ahlqvist *et al.* 2010, p4). Therefore whilst social media is used for various purposes by the firm, which is mainly to generate awareness, it is also used for professional networking. Clients are often looking for new ways to interact with companies as sites such as Twitter and Facebook are employed by Betterlanguages.com Ltd to share content about the business and well as to heighten awareness of their activities usually through the use of blogging, which is one of the main advantages of social media (Fischer and Reuber 2010). However, it is through the use of the site LinkedIn that most clearly demonstrates the firm's networking capabilities; this type of site allows professionals to build up a list of "connections" with whom they have some sort of relationship with. The site currently shows that the CEO of Betterlanguages.com Ltd has over 500 connections made up of clients, suppliers, translators as well as personal connections. However, one point of contention is the extent to which sites such as these reveal the list of clients to other competitors. While it is useful to be seen by potential clients on social media websites this could also be viewed by competitors hence existing clients could be poached. For this reason the connections on LinkedIn are shown to be private until they a connection is requested, so that an entire client or even supplier list are not made public.

5.3 Interaction Marketing

A prerequisite to a successful business relationship is undoubtedly interaction (Ford 1990). For relationships to function there needs to be an established method of interaction between firms. Five interviewees identified clear communication as key factor in successful business relationships. As their clients are geographically dispersed most of the interaction between Bettlerlanguages.com Ltd and their clients is through email and telephone contact. It is through these mediums that clients place orders and monitor the progress of their translation needs. One company explained Betterlanguages.com Ltd had:

> *"Good customer service definitely, and the fact that you email all the information, they will always email back and acknowledge it and send the instructions [translated work] in a couple of days" (Company C 2011).*

The speed and reliability of response was a factor that three of the client interviewed highly valued. They remarked that while it is important that the firm maintain its professional stance they also found that the service they received was friendly and approachable. All of these factors can be traced back to transaction satisfaction as outlined by Garbarino and Johnson (1999). Furthermore, If there were any queries with clients orders these were often solved via a phone call. When asked about successful business relationships one staff member stated

> *"Communicating, keeping in touch with them, keeping them up to date with things, even if there is not much happening with their project; just letting them know we are here" (Employee D 2011).*

This reiterates their personal approach to dealing with clients, they wish to keep the client updated even if perhaps there is not much to clarify. One staff member explained that:

"I would even go as far to say that we engineer phone conversations, quite deliberately sometimes, just to keep contact" (Employee A 2011).

Regular contact with clients is therefore valued by the company to strengthen business relationships and by getting to know the customer. Through observation data collection it was noted that even when contracts were lost by Betterlanguages.com Ltd they were aware that client were prospectively shopping for a new translation agency for various projects they would often call casually to remain in their customer's mind (Hunter, 2011).

5.4 Customer Relationship Management

In terms of CRM, Betterlanguages.com Ltd do not use a formal system to analyse client data. They advocated that they prefer a more personalised service offering, as one employee explains,

"We do not have a formal system and we tend to react to client need. We do proactively phone clients, but I know I do not like the sales phone call, that 'it's your three-monthly phone call'. I find, with people selling to us, that I do not like it. I think the kind of clients that we have, if they are a big client, and there is regular contact, then there is probably not a systematic follow-up, but there is constant communication with the client" (Employee A 2011).

However from participant observation it was noted that they do rely heavily on technology to communicate with clients and suppliers. For each individual client they store a folder which contains various information including all previous exchanges with the client and the source text. This allows them to track the order through to various stages as well as check for any irregularities or cost disagreements. Whilst this is not used in the buying or selling process it is a useful way of building up customer data, which can be considered to be a form of analytical CRM (Buttle 1996). This data storage works to the firm's advantage as they can track previous translations for the clients, which in turn allows greater consistency as they can use the same set of translators and develop a bank of firm-specific phrases. Drawing on the ideas of

Ryals and Payne (2001) such storage of data indicates the firm are able to trace orders at every stage and information can be frequently updated, and edited for future use or reference. One client comments that she found this very useful,

> *"I also like the fact they keep everything on their system, it builds up a library, so you don't have to revisit something you have already done" (Company E).*

Betterlanguages.com Ltd currently stores information on job requests even if they are not followed through giving them potential future client information, allowing them to remain up-to-date with orders and to remember details of such interactions. Lastly clients have clarified that they also use forms of database organisation to store their translation, as company B state:

> *"Once we have got that translation we put it on a database file that goes throughout our business" (Company B 2011).*

This suggests that both the firm and clients utilise a database system in which to store information. Although this is not a formal CRM system it can be considered as using technology to back up previous contact and information relating to translation projects which is beneficial for both parties involved.

5.4 Relationship constructs

When discussing relationship development several scholars refer to trust, commitment, satisfaction and relationship dependence as key constructs (Eggert and Ulaga 2000). All of these elements are seen as necessary to develop successful business relationships, in the case of Betterlanguages.com Ltd, however both data collection methods also drew on the themes of the balance between price and quality, the need for personalised service and clear and honest communication. All of these themes will now be explored in turn in relation to Betterlanguages.com Ltd's client relationships as means of answering the first aim of this research.

5.4.1 TRUST

One of the most significant themes identified from conducting the interviews was establishing trust between both parties. Every single interviewee acknowledged that trust is important in translation agency-client relationships which reiterates Morgan and Hunt's (1994) argument that trust is a "key mediating variable" in relational exchanges. Without trust companies cannot work together and reach mutual goals (Anderson and Narus 1990; Doney and Cannon 1997). As two employees comment,

"trust is absolutely vital" (Employee A 2011)

"Trust is vital. You need to trust the person that is going to do something. We provide translation that the client does not necessarily understand [...] so if they do not trust that it is going to be checked and quality controlled, then we will not have them" (Employee B 2011).

This idea was further reiterated by participant observation which further suggested that there must be trust in the relationship to ensure that each party can rely upon each other to perform as desired to achieve a positive outcome (Anderson and Narus 1990). For Betterlanguages.com Ltd they must ensure that clients trust that they will get the work translated accurately and on time, so they must be reliable, this is essential for the relationship to be continued. All of the clients interviewed commented that trust was vital for them to work with another company. As Company C comment,

"[The importance of trust] goes without saying really" (Company C).

When asked about successful business relationships in more general terms Company A remarks,

"Honesty, reliability, are obviously quite valued in a relationship [...]I am German, so I can proof read the German translation [...] which is great, but we do not have all the languages in-house, so, we trust them" (Company A 2011).

This reiterates what employee B states, the client cannot check all of the work herself so she realises that to a great extent she must trust that Betterlanguages.com Ltd is going to provide quality translations that she needs.

5.4.2 Commitment

The concept of commitment was also touched upon in six of the interviews demonstrating its importance when discussing relational marketing. Several interviewees stated that with the establishment of trust parties are likely to be highly committed to one another (Dwyer *et al.* 1987). The fact that all five client interviews admitted they wished to continue to work with Betterlanguages.com LTD shows that they are willing to commit to future transactions (Ulaga and Eggert 2006). Furthermore, two clients interviewed have been using Betterlanguages.com Ltd so a considerable time period, they remark,

"We have been using Betterlanguages.com Ltd probably for five or ten years" (Company C 2011).

"I've probably used them more than anyone else in the UK" (Company E 2011).

Both of these comments reinforce the importance of commitment (Moorman *et al.* 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994).

5.4.3 The Balance between price and quality

This level of commitment reduces the risk of uncertainty (Achrol *et al.* 1990) as clients trust that Betterlanguages.com Ltd will deliver the type of translation they require. However, as the translation industry is highly price sensitive many clients considered price was a factor that was likely to affect their commitment. As participant observation indicated the balance between seeking a reasonable price and quality translation was both a major a concern for both clients and betterlanguages.com Ltd. As Betterlanguages.com Ltd are "at the high quality end of the market" (Hunter 2011) they are aware that many of their clients can find their prices quite high but seek to distinguish themselves through a high quality offering. This was observed through participant observation as well as personal communication with CEO. As one staff member explains,

"If our clients value the service we give, they never go. If a client thinks 'Why should I pay this when a machine gives it to me?' That is a lack of understanding of the work" (Employee B 2011).

Thus companies who value the quality of translation are more likely to use Betterlanguages.com Ltd's services and return to them as a committed customer (Ulaga and Eggert 2006). Employee A and two client comment,

"If they do not care [about the quality of translation], they can probably source cheaper and they are not going to value our service" (Employee A 2011).

"We might make comparison between other agencies, because that is what you have to do, just in case they overcharge you. Obviously you need to make them aware of that and, if they cannot match it, then go with someone else" (Company A 2011).

"It is not as cheap as we would like it to be, but we get a good service and we know we have to pay for that" (Company B 2011).

This demonstrates that clients are highly price sensitive and that while they value the quality of translation they are aware that prices have to be competitive. Clients who are seeking cheaper translation are unlikely to look to outsource their translation to agencies on a long term basis and instead seek to search for the cheapest deals often resulting in poor translations. Lastly Betterlanguages.com Ltd has demonstrated the high value they attach to client relationships through strong levels of commitment. From participant observation it was understood by the researcher that one business relationship with a client unfortunately resulted in the loss of the contract with Betterlanguages.com Ltd as the needs to the company changed, but despite this they still are their preferred supplier with the UK branch of that company (Hunter 2011). The maintenance of regular contact with the company is used a means of communicating their willingness to step in if they experience problems with new translation company and cooperation potential in the future.

5.4.4 Satisfaction

When interviewing staff it was clear that customer satisfaction was a top priority for them. In order to achieve customer satisfaction staff were keen to speak to clients regularly and ensure that translation quality was as expected. In two client interviews and in three staff interviews interviewees commented that if they were ever any problems concerning the context of translation then they would not hesitate to call the client. This was done in order to ensure the translation was done to the best standards. As two clients explain,

"Some of the instructions are quite complicated, so if they are any queries, they will just ask us exactly what we mean by something, like just odd words. For example, we use the word 'net' or 'netting' in one of our instructions, and the French did not know how to translate that, whether it was like a fishing net. It was crystal veiling that you use for valet skirts and things so when we told them the word, the French understood. So, they go that extra mile to make sure they are translating it correctly" (Company C 2011).

"I remember, a little while ago, there was an issue with some French translations, where the translator had used a word my French colleague just did not recognise, they worked quite pro-actively when we asked them to change this word, because we don't know that word, they changed it all for me" (Company A 2011).

All of the clients admitted they were satisfied with the service they were currently receiving from Betterlanguages.com Ltd and would go as far to recommend them to other companies which is in line with the research of Singh and Sirdeshmukh (2000). Again, all wish to continue to work with them, Company D and C as they feel as though,

"The service we received was very good, so from my point of view, I have every intention of using them again" (Company D 2011).

"I would definitely recommend them" (Company C 2011).

When interviewing clients it became evident that customers are satisfied when work is completed on time and to a high quality. Therefore understanding the customer needs was highlighted by all staff members as essential to gaining customer satisfaction, which is in line with Berry's (1995) argument that establishing clients' needs leads to the creation of a social rapport that facilitates tailoring the firm's offering to the customer. This thorough understanding of clients' needs and expectations was highlighted as one of the main reasons clients chose to continue to work with Betterlaguages.com Ltd, again can be seen to reinforce the ideas of Henning-Thurau and Klee (1997) who discuss satisfaction as a central premise of customer retention. This is reaffirmed by two clients,

"Each party needs to know what is required" (Company B 2011).

"We have to be very careful that we get the right format of the translation. That is why we use a company such as Bettlerlanguages.com Ltd, because they are skilled at it" (Company B 2011).

5.4 5 The need for personalised service

The importance of engaging a client in a personalised dialogue can be seen to be beneficial for the firm to foster closer relationships with their clients and better understandings of their needs as argued by Bruhn (2003). When asked about working with previous agencies and their dislikes of other agencies one client commented,

"Sometimes I don't like the person selling the service over the telephone" (Company E 2011)

This demonstrates that clients are looking for a personalised service from their translation provider, which many of Betterlanguages.com Ltd's clients commented that they offered including Company A and D,

"A very good professional firm… very friendly" (Company A 2011).

"The chap I spoke to, please forgive me for not remembering his name [...] is very, very informed. He has a total understanding of our needs as a foods manufacturer" (Company D 2011).

Two clients interviewed clarified that their satisfaction stems from Betterlanguages.com Ltd's specialism in a niche area of the market, translating food and clothing labels. They were keen to express that this was highly valued to them. However, there was no clear system to ascertain whether a client was satisfied with service. Occasionally clients send e-mails and these are often used as testimonials after a completed translation projects and used on their website. (Hunter 2011). The only negative piece of evidence that was obtained by the researcher was that whilst pleased with the overall customer service they were receiving one company as an SME felt while,

"I do find they are very good, but sometimes tied up with big accounts, so I never feel as though I am getting a very personalised service" (Company E 2011).

This was surprising to hear amongst other such positive feedback and may have gone unnoticed by staff. This particular client felt that while the service she received was polite and seeming efficient there was not enough attention given to her fairly small yearly translation project. This negative experience, however, did not prevent the client from wishing to continue her dealings with the company. This can be considered as fairly unusual as customers who experience lower satisfaction levels have been found to decline further transactions with that company (Buchanan and Gilles 1990). Therefore the findings of interviews highlight the importance for service firms to measure the consumer's experience and satisfaction as highlighted by Berry and Parasuraman (1993) and Fisk *et al.* (1993). From participant observation the researcher discerned that there was not a formal system for measuring customer's experience.

5.4.6 Relationship Dependence

In terms of relationship dependence it seems from participant observation that in translation agency-client relationships that clients depend on Betterlanguages.com Ltd to deliver high quality translation, at competitive prices all at often considerably quickly. Clients that have worked with Betterlanguages.com Ltd over longer periods of time are used to projects being turnaround very quickly, and often the use of the same translators to ensure consistency of the translation.

"To be fair to them they give us what we need in fairly good timescales. They make a few mistakes but everybody makes mistakes. It is not as cheap as we would like it to be, but we get a good service and we know we have to pay for that" (Company B 2011).

"I have used a few [translation agencies]. I think it's a mixture of the quality of service, the accuracy of translation and the cost" (Company E 2011).

Several clients mentioned that they were dependent on Betterlanguages.com Ltd for their current translation needs but admitted to using other agencies. Thus whilst had established trust the firm they had varying levels of commitment and therefore lower relationship dependence as explained by Fung, Chen and Yip (2007). Clients explained that while they value the service they are receiving from Betterlanguages.com Ltd it was vital that they are price aware when making translation outsourcing decisions. Company A comment,

"We might make comparisons with other agencies as that it what you have to do" (Company A 2011).

Only two of the clients interviewed, both of which were SMEs, used Betterlanguages.com Ltd as their sole translation service provider and as such placed considerably smaller orders that the larger companies that Betterlanguages.com Ltd worked with. So, from this is it appears that the size of the client greatly effects their dependency in terms of loyalty and awareness of other translation providers.

Two clients additionally mentioned that they were reliant on Betterlanguages.com Ltd due to their perceived specialisms in the translation area they worked in. These two clients were aware that they could perhaps acquire translations elsewhere that would not sufficiently accurate in terms of context or appreciation of niche technical specialisms. Companies B and D explain,

"We use Betterlanguages.com Ltd for that and we use a translation house, because it is a specialised business" (Company B 2011).

"What we need here are technical translators. We need people who can translate, who have an appreciation of food legislation, so other translation companies, whilst they can probably translate an ingredients list, they have no awareness of what we can say legally, what would be misleading, and what would not be misleading and Betterlanguages.com Ltd has that background" (Company D 2011).

For Betterlanguages.com Ltd itself it was clear that they were dependent on trust and reliability of the client when accepting translation projects. One of the employees commented that they are dependent on customers who are aware that the quality of translation was vital rather than those who merely sought a cheap alternative. The customer must trust that they will receive the type of translation they request as opposed to pressurising the firm to reduce their prices. This type of perspective client were not sought by the firm as they would often try to 'play the system and switch to the cheapest provider' (Hunter 2011). Another employee commented that they are also reliant that customers will pay on time, although this was a fairly rare problem for the company.

5.4.7 Clear Communication

Four interviewees directly stated that they perceive clear communication as vital in maintaining successful business relationships. In order for the relationship to function each party needs to be acutely aware of what the other is expecting and the only way this can be ascertained is through clear and regular communication (Conway and Swift 2000). Two members of staff explained that working with clients was made easier when they developed a relationship with the client and clearly understood their needs,

"It is about communication I think. Obviously, you try to do everything the best you can, but it is not about not making one mistake, which we all do, even though we try not to. It is about how to deal with these things. If the client knows that you are 100%, and you really understand them, it goes from there really, just talking and asking questions" (Employee B 2011).

"Good communication. It does help to have a good relationship in the sense that you can laugh and joke. It makes everything a lot easier, and you are less worried or intimidated about phoning them" (Employee C 2011).

They both highlighted that if there was a problem or something needed to be queried it could usually be solved over a phone call and this would be easier with clients they have established a rapport with.

Similarly clients shared this view of communication and admitted honesty and clear communication were also highly valued to them. They were aware that if they were any issues relating to work, or the possibility of it being late there would be regular updates and communication between both parties. Company A comments,

"[Betterlanguages.com Ltd is] very responsive, [they] get back to us very quickly, [are] very reliable, very friendly, only positive things really" (Company A 2011).

Although none of the communication was face-to-face the clients were not phased by this and often cited friendly personal service as a valued attribute of Betterlanguages.com Ltd. Furthermore clients are often attributed to various members of staff who deal with particular contracts or types of translation. This suggests that the staff member is knowledgeable in certain technical or somewhat specialist areas of translation and has frequent contact where possible with the same clients (Hunter 2011). However, there was a concern that established clients, who have worked with Betterlanguages.com Ltd for a number of years are likely to fall into a routine of communication that is heavily reliant on e-mail. As there is no formal contract use by Betterlanguages.com Ltd they receive their orders on a job-by-job basis and they reply with a quotation. This quotation is sometimes agreed by a word rate in set languages, but again this can be seen to be habitual which suits clients that are looking for a fast service and speedy turnaround but it makes the contact between clients less personal. Hence from participant observation it was learned that personal communication with clients was extremely necessary for Betterlanguages.com Ltd and that a system of ordering a translation project online whilst preferable for clients would not be in their best interest as this removes all elements of personal communication and personalised service and could serve to make the client aware that this service could easily be replicated elsewhere.

The need for direct communication was stressed by all members of staff at Betterlanguages.com Ltd. As each project is unique, there may be issues concerning the context of the translation. Employee D commented it was more difficult to work with clients who do not appreciate the complexities of translation and just supplied “bare words” (Employee D 2011). This meat that it takes more time to explain to the client that they require additional information and linguistic difficulties. Moreover working with the client closely can ensure they understand certain practicalities that are in use by the company such as acronyms, titles, in-house style and capitalisation (Hunter 2011). Employee A (2011) explains.

> “If you [have] lots of repeat business all the time, it gets easier, because you develop a team of translators who are familiar with a client, with the terminology” (Employee A 2011).

5.6 Corporate Reputation

One emergent theme from coding the interviews as well as participant observation was the firm’s reliance on reputation. The concept of a good, reliable reputation was important as part of their image when initiating the relationship. In terms of relationship development their reputation often led to clients to maintain their relationship with Betterlanguages.com Ltd. This is beneficial to Betterlanguages.com Ltd as maintaining a relationship has been proven to be more profitable than acquiring news clients (Reichheld and Sasser 1990). Additionally, achieving a reputation as technically specialised resulted in clients often referring them to other companies or suppliers. Particularly their reputation as a specialist translation of food packaging and clothing labels were considered by three clients as preferable when seeking a translation provider, one employee explains,

> *"We were talking about brand, and what they were saying is that brand is everything to them, so it needs to be right, well-presented and professional. Well, that is our approach too" (Employee A 2011)*

It was noted that the perceived technical specialisms by clients meant that they regarded Betterlanguages.com Ltd as a certain type of translation provider. Thus, the firm's reputation as specialised in technical types of translation concurs with both Hanson *et al.* 's (2008) contention that reputation can be an asset to the owner of the firm and Ganesan's (1994) theory that reputation it is a source of competitive advantage. One key client that Betterlanguages.com Ltd currently supply care labels to were reluctant to use them for their food labelling partly due to the fact they were so strongly associated with clothing label competencies (Hunter 2011). Thus while certain aspects of their reputation led to recommendations to others by clients it also hindered their progress in enlarging a current contract to span various translation requirements in different departments.

Furthermore, during participant observation it was highlighted by the company that they were extremely aware that the company is focused on the issue of reputation as well as the issue of generating customer awareness (Hunter 2011). The CEO explained that reputation is highly important as the client expects to receive the expertise of Betterlanguages.com Ltd to recruit the correct translators to ensure that the work is translated accurately and that Betterlanguages.com Ltd will undertake quality control checks to ensure that it meets the clients needs and expectations. Again, this stresses the role of corporate reputation in fostering client relationships, as clients need to feel assured that by using a company they will receive the best quality translation. As one employee explains they must be cautious to preserve their reputation,

> *"We have had a situation in the past, where we have had to turn down work. We were asked to quote by [a Client] earlier in the year, and it was such a ridiculous volume, in twenty four hours, that there was no point in going ahead. The problem there was that we would have had to use a lot of different translators, all at the same time, on a set of files that would read as though they had been written by eight authors. You end up with a mess and it has got our name against it a long time after the urgency of the deadline is forgotten by the client. There is a time to say no, because it is just not achievable. Generally, retail is quite fast moving and with a fast turnaround" (Employee A 2011).*

This suggests that an order of this size would overwhelm the company, as an SME as it demands various skills and resources to an extremely fast turnaround. Betterlanguages.com Ltd made an informed decision that, as they would not be able to translate to their usual standards in this time it would not be worth risking their reputation by doing so.

In terms of reputation the size of the company was also seen to affect the buyer's confidence level and perceived competency level. There was a divide between customers who sought to outsource their translation to large agencies to feel more secure that there work was being dealt with professionally and reliably and the argument that larger companies were seen as informal. As the CEO of Betterlanguages.com Ltd commented when one client was searching for a translation provider they commented that while they were not going to select Betterlanguages.com Ltd as their contract would be too large for them to handle they would not work with on the large international companies as it was felt that their contract would not be valued by them despite being worth over 1 million pounds. They advocated a dislike for such multinational companies who were seeking profit and not concerned with the satisfaction or personalised service when working with clients (Hunter 2011). Thus it can be concluded that as an SME Betterlanguages.com Ltd is currently positioned to offer a highly personalised service and this is what their reputation lends itself to. With any type of expansion or the acceptance of a larger contract would mean that they would need to ensure that reputation was not hampered by such affects.

5.7 Summary

This chapter has discussed the findings concerning the development of Betterlanguages.com Ltd's client relationships. It has shown that Relationship Marketing plays a critical role in Betterlanguages.com Ltd's business activities and these relationships can be classified under the network and interaction marketing. From both the first hand interviews and participant observation carried out by the researcher it can be concluded the integration of these methods allowed a deeper insight into the relationship constructs valid in the case of Betterlanguages.com Ltd as well as the ideas of CRM and firm reputation. The next chapter will attempt to draw the main themes of the research together and explore limitations and future research directions as well as discussing the managerial implications of the findings.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This thesis investigates the concept of Relationship Marketing in a business-to-business context. It explores Betterlanguages.com Ltd's client relationships by means of analysing the relevant scholarly research and the primary data collected from conducting this case study. It has focused on how relationships are developed and maintained by Betterlanguages.com Ltd. and discussed the theoretical concepts that are most appropriate to describe the translation company-client relationship examined. This chapter will summarise the findings of the thesis as well as answering the second objective which is to suggest potential Relationship Marketing strategies through which customers' relationships can be strengthened and customers retained in the long run by Betterlanguages.com Ltd, and potentially other B2B service firms. It also considers the limitations of the scope of the study and presents directions for future research.

6.1 KEY FINDINGS

This thesis has explored the importance of relationship development in the case of Betterlanguages.com Ltd as well as for their clients. It has suggested that successful relationships depend on the premise that both parties are determined to work together, often for long periods of time to achieve mutual goals. Following the network approach (IMP Group) and interaction marketing the key relationship concepts identified from the literature review, this thesis has identified characteristics of relationship development that are applicable to Betterlanguages.com Ltd.'s dyadic relationships.

This research has identified some of the key relationship variables that are present in Betterlanguages.com Ltd.'s client relationships. Trust was identified as one of the most important factors influencing agency-client relationships as argued by Morgan and Hunt (1994). Both the staff and clients interviewed were acutely aware that without trust the relationship would not be able to progress and was therefore considered to be on the most crucial elements of working with a translation agency. This element of trust hinged up the belief that both sides were going to deliver what was required (Anderson and Narus 1990) and clients of

Betterlanguages.com Ltd felt that this should be quality translation, a fast turnaround and a fair price.

Another relationship construct that was highlighted by this study as pivotal to translation agency-client relationships was satisfaction. There was clear positive relationship between customers who considered themselves satisfied with the service they were receiving and the desire to continue to work with Betterlanguages.com Ltd. (Henning-Thurau and Klee 1997) It was highlighted that customers generally felt very satisfied with Betterlanguages.com Ltd's offering as well as customer service.

However, both commitment and relationship dependence were held to be present in agency–client relationships but were of lesser importance than trust and satisfaction. Whilst some clients were highly committed to Betterlanguages.com Ltd, having worked with them for years and happy to continue to do so, others commented that they would continue to work with them but showed a high concern for price. This price sensitivity greatly effected levels of commitment, especially in larger translation contracts as clients were concerned with quality but to a larger extent with seeking a fair and reasonable price. As a result of price sensitive customers this diminished relationship dependence levels. However, Betterlanguages.com Ltd itself demonstrated high levels of relationship dependence in contrast to some of their rather opportunistic low-price seeking clients. To them fostering relationships built on trust and high commitment was a main objective and thus gives the frim a very customer centric focus.

The role of communication between client and agency, which is often neglected when discussion relationship dynamics was of considerable importance to strengthening Betterlanguages.com Ltd.'s client relationships (Conway and Swift 2000). Clients were keen to cite friendly, clear and personal communication (Bruhn 2003) as one the major factors contributing to their satisfaction with the relationship as well as one of the key solutions to problem solving with translation queries. Staff also emphasised that establishing a close relationship with a client was often desirable as this was best developed through open and honest communication relating to the speed of translation work and turnaround.

Lastly the firm's reputation as technically specialised in various areas of translation was also demonstrated to be integral to relationship development. Whilst this perceived reputation resulted in clients often referring them to other companies or suppliers it also meant that clients were more willing to trust them based on their previous dealings with the company and the additional factor that their reputation of providing quality translation aids to provide clients with additional reassurance. It was noted however, that whilst in more general terms it was positive to have a reliable and trustworthy corporate reputation such a strong association of specialism meant that clients were reluctant to use Betterlanguages.com Ltd to span more of their translation needs, for example, in different company departments. This is one particular issue that Betterlanguage.com Ltd must decide whether to act upon as operating in such a niche has been extremely beneficial to them in maintaining relationships with clients in particular industries.

6.2 Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that whilst every effort has been made by the researcher to conduct thorough research there are inevitably limitations. One such limitation as Yin (2009) states is the impact of the experience of the researcher on the research conducted. Therefore it must be acknowledged that a first time researcher conducted this thesis and this may have had an impact on the depth of research scope as well as confidence levels when conducting interviews and the ability to analyse these fully.

One of the major factors limiting this thesis was time constraint, as there was only a three-month period in which to gather and analyse the data. This meant that the researcher was restricted in the number of interviews they could conduct and resulted in a smaller sample size than desired.

Furthermore due to the geographical dispersion of clients interviews were conducted by telephone, which meant that they were often short as many interviewees were pressed for time. In addition in was difficult to build a rapport with the interviewees and the researcher had to follow a tight interview structure which impacted on the quality and depth of responses to interview questions.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

As this was a single-embedded case study it would undoubtedly benefit from improvements such as expansion by interviewing more clients or conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews. This would enable the researcher to gather additional and possibly richer data for analysis. As this study is limited to understanding client relationships a further research direction could be to analyse beyond Betterlanguages.com Ltd's dyadic relationships to include their network of translators and suppliers. As Betterlanguages.com Ltd is reliant on translators to provide their translation work; this would be an integral part of their business interactions and undoubtedly warrant further study. Furthermore, examining relationships over a longer time period would enable the researcher to map relationship development over time and explore the various relationship stages. Potentially this could lead to the expansion of further avenues of research including relationship initiation or termination. One further avenue for further research on Betterlanguages.com Ltd's network relationships would be to further examine their use of social media to communicate and network with clients.

Another research direction could be to form cross case analysis by examining other translation agencies to gain a deeper understanding of the translation industry itself. This could either examine agencies similar in size to the firm, for example other SMEs in the industry or contrast Betterlanguages.com Ltd to larger translation agencies. This would perhaps enable the comparison to discover whether the size of the company effects the development of client relationships and personalised service. One could examine translation agencies from an international aspect and investigate whether firm origins affect their client relationships, and compare Betterlanguages.com Ltd to firms based in different countries. Or indeed, as the translation industry has an intrinsic international element, future researchers could examine the impact of physic distance on Relationship Marketing strategies held by translation firms.

6.4 Recommendations

From the analysis of the research conducted at Betterlanguages.com Ltd as well analysis of the literature review, various themes will now elaborated upon to generate recommendations in order to fulfil one of the research aims of this dissertation. These recommendations will concern the development of Relationship Marketing specifically at Betterlanguages.com Ltd, for B2B services in general as well as for translation clients.

6.4.1 For Betterlanguages.com Ltd

The findings of this thesis suggest that building and maintain close relationship clients is an area in which Betterlanguages.com Ltd currently excels, and that they demonstrate a keen awareness of its importance in organisational success and building reputation. This approach must be maintained in order to the firm to operate efficiently and for relational exchanges to reduce risk and uncertainty between both partners.

One of the first recommendations this research proposes is that of client monitoring and feedback. Whilst customer service was considered by many clients to be excellent Betterlangages.com Ltd needs to ensure that it remains so. Clients are unlikely to give negative feedback unless prompted so an introduction of a formal system of feedback would enable the firm to monitor and then adapt their actions accordingly.

Moreover if the firm were to attempt to foster more relationships in the Nottingham area this would encourage greater scope for network marketing. This would earn them a larger grounding in local contracts and in turn, interaction would be amongst local business enabling face-to-face contact between the firm and clients. Such personal interaction would facilitate the development of relationship as well as gaining the firm greater marketing exposure in Nottinghamshire and the possibility of further client recommendations.

Another possible strategy for Betterlanguages.com Ltd to consider is a clearer approach to client segmentation. Whilst work is currently done on a job-by-job basis expansion would mean that it would be difficult to continue to interact with client on such a personal level without a segmentation strategy and the use of organising clients into segments. As well as ensuring certain staff take on various contracts depending on their experience within such type of translation management it would ensure that each client was offered a consistent level of service. Whilst the researcher is not suggesting they take an automated approach to segmentation it would worth categorising clients to compare commitment levels and directions in which to expand. Thus the formation of a customer database would enable the firm to organise clients whilst ensuring that smaller clients are not neglected in this process.

6.4.2 For B2B Service Firms

From the recommendations suggested to Betterlanguages.com Ltd is possible to extend these to a wider application by other translation agencies and other, similar B2B service firms. Developing relationships with customers is an essential part of any service firm's marketing strategy so relational strategies such as a focus on fostering trust, commitment and satisfaction amongst clients would be critical. If the business seeks to focus on customer retention, this can only be achieved through ameliorating current contact and dealings with clients. They may wish to improve the personal level of communication with clients, increase the frequently, tailor their services to meet the changing need of the client and to build a customer centric attitude. It would be wise to ensure that this is adopted on a firm wide level to ensure consistency amongst departments. This form of internal marketing is useful as it aligns the firms intended message and delivery, so Relationship Marketing should be adopted and acknowledged as a continual process that ensures all employees are driven to increase levels of customer satisfaction.

6.4.3 For Clients

As with the recommendations for firms, clients need to be aware that Relationship Marketing is a continual process. Thus they should seek to evaluate their service providers frequently to ensure that they are receiving an approach that is tailored to their needs. They need to ensure that they do not merely continue to work with firms based on their reputation but continue to evaluate other relationship variables to avoid any hindrance to firm progression. Regular communication should be encouraged to ensure that expected outcome and service offerings are delivered as desired. The use of feedback is essential to build up trust between firms and clients and to ensure the relationships that are maintained are those that are most beneficial to the client.

All of these recommendations submitted for various groups highlight the potential of the successful implementation of Relationship Marketing. This thesis suggests that the intrinsic elements of successful relationships are establishing trust and providing clear communication as other relationships constructs such as commitment, satisfaction, personalised service and reputation are all important in the case of Betterlanuages.com Ltd. Thus the potential contribution of this research has been to gain academic and managerial understanding of B2B client-service firm relationships in this specific firm setting.

7.0 References

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Appendix A

Participant Observation Notes From 21 June 2011

Had a meeting with Mike to discuss Relationship Marketing. He explained 90% of business is repeat business therefore relationships are vital to maintain for Betterlanguages. Furthermore, it is done on a job by job basis so there is high risk involved. Mike also informed me that there was a large deal in process which could potentially have a very strong impact on Betterlanguages. A deal of this size would mean that they'd have to employ more translators, increase their scale and potentially have an on-going contract.

Mike wishes BL to appear as Betterlanguages.com Ltd in the final draft of the dissertation.

Industry Information from Mike:

2010 26 Billion USD

Common Sense Advisory – research documents on the industry but very expensive, explains market very fragmented in terms of sellers.

SLD in competition for Marks and Spencer Contract

Buyers want confidence – often go for larger agencies to feel secure

How much should you focus on a niche? Larger companies may want all their translation needs covered – how to counter this strategy?

Technology – machine translation

- pos: offers speed, low cost, whole industry devoted to this within IT, e-commerce
- Neg: accuracy, word environments do not offer full patches but parts of phrases, needs to be checked by human translator

Computer Assisted Translation

- Moves to integrate the phrase matches to build up a database, will match down to 50%, risk translators work too fast
- More useful in some types of translation eg manuals, clinical trials

Some agencies have developed their own software – eg Trados owned by SDL

Technical specialism – match translators with different expertise levels and approach

In-house staff teams + post editing – strategy by competitors, very convenient to clients, price of machine to translate

BL currently emphasise quality

New clients tend to be retained (less so public sector) price sensitivity

e-commerce relatively new market – BL page does well

care labels – price competitive, extremely good mark-up, established client base in industry leaders, weakness: limited market size

food labels – large player in international market already have an established translating company, need to find new markets or companies new to export, manufacturers and large retailers that do their own packaging

small clients – ie House of Crafts – two jobs a year, hence low demand but come back each year

CRM no software, personalised service

2 translation managers at BL, for a new contract would recruit a new TM

Quality assurance – task is it to make it more practical and useful

In theory add TM as BL expands, IT wise easy to do, extranet area of website – handle larger doc by FTP and have translation memory available online, e-commerce company 8-10 translators per lang

Relationships important to BL - Mothercare lost contract but still preferred supplier with UK companies, will be willing to step in if they experience problems with new translation company, lost contract as needs had changed

Tesco - 4 central European Markets, quality issues with existing suppliers – work down on price and then likely to switch for a cheaper service

Any client will choose quality first, hence trust important (personal recommendations)

Moving up and down supply chain significant

- Number of languages varies on client
- Food shelf life
- Distribution issue for client: packaging available space
- Eg Bonbon buddies regulations, 14 languages, shorter texts, value in volume or in languages

Canon14 languages 56k contract value much more substantial amount of work in terms of languages

Languages themselves vary in price – e.g. Chinese, Arabic sourcing is an issue

Chinese not sourced in China:

- Verify credentials
- Lack of appreciation of western culture
- Language level

Some agencies specialise in certain languages – in-house proofs

But as a whole these kind of vendors are being squeezed out as mark-up becomes less

Sourcing-

- Order process now online – straight to translator
- Dilemma lose relationship with the client
- Clients attracted to methodology – time pressured
- but need to understand individual company:
    - Health and safety procedure internal to company
    - Expressions internal to the company – dialogue needed

Point of sale translation for Marks and Spencer – practicalities in use, acronyms, titles, house style capitalisation

Do not always see product contextually – just bare words

Culture – Hong Kong Client avoid asking questions, Chinese regulations on clothing for example – context required

Translators normally aware of who the client is – need to know basis

Set phrases different for different clients – in-house style, phrases, weakness with clothing garments can be incorrectly labelled risk of standards

Environmental issues for packaging

Rentention and development

Tesco – supplier avery – relationship delicate, supply chain relationship

Competitor awareness, exclusivity expertise balanace?

Process stage observation

APPENDIX B

Interview with Employee A

Interviewer: Let's get started with the first question. Can you tell me the range of clients that you work with and, as I understand you work with lots, perhaps give examples of the two extremes?

Employee A: You can categorise clients in a number of ways, such as by size of client. We have big multi-nationals as clients and SME's[1] are on the other extreme. That is one means of categorisation. You could also categorise by complication of project. For example, the smallest job we would ever do is twenty five pounds, and the largest we have ever done on a single order is about fifty six thousand, which was a fourteen language website for a large multinational. There are quite big differences there. Also, texts have different aspects, because you can have a large volume of work in a single language, or you can have work with smaller amounts of text, but in a lot of languages. For instance, we are looking at some work for [Client X] at the moment, which would be in sixteen languages. Therefore, the text would typically be quite small. It might just be the product title and a bit of limited marketing information, but in a lot of languages.

Interviewer: How do you contact clients, or what is your general means of communication with them?

Employee A: The most common means of communication is email, so typically they would contact us by email and we would contact them by email. However, we do talk a lot on the phone as well. I would even go so far as to say that we engineer phone conversations, quite deliberately sometimes, just to keep contact. It is always good to build a relationship with a client, and the better you understand the client's need, the better you serve them. I think, in our industry, it can be extremely price-focussed and price competitive, and certainly we have some clients where they are just buying on price. You think you are doing a really good job, building a really good customer service, and on the next job another agency happens to be five pounds cheaper, and they get the work. That can be a bit disheartening. Really, what we want to do is to work with a client over a long period of time.

Interviewer: How do you arrange your contracts with clients?

Employee A: We do not have contracts. Most work, in effect, is a spot contract, so the client asks us to quote, we agree a price and a timescale and then the client says yes or no. That is essentially how it works.

Interviewer: Are there any particular clients that you enjoy working with?

Employee A: Most of them. Some projects can be difficult, particularly if there is a lot of inconsistency from job to job. For example, when we were dealing with large volume work for Mothercare®, at the time we were dealing with the same nine languages every time, so it was relatively straightforward, irrespective of volume, because we would use the same translators wherever possible. We had agreed rates with the translators and we had agreed rates with the client. If we had queries about the text, we would know who to deal with and, in effect, you are repeating a lot of the same from job to job. That is also true with [Client Y] There is only so much variety in food labelling, even for quite different products. So, there is a lot of consistency there, from job to job.

We also have clients for whom every job is different, such as different language combinations, or a different type of text. I would say, with retail deadlines, there is always a big issue. They always want everything yesterday. I had a meeting with [Client Z) in London yesterday, and one of the staff was joking that out of about two thousand projects, she had only ever had two that were not marked urgent. That can be the issue; that they always want things very, very fast. It is always a dilemma, because quality and speed do not easily sit together. Obviously, we want to give a quality service.

We have had a situation in the past, where we have had to turn down work. We were asked to quote by [Client W} earlier in the year, and it was such a ridiculous volume, in twenty four hours, that there was no point in going ahead. The problem there was that we would have had to use a lot of different translators, all at the same time, on a set of files that would read as though they had been written by eight authors. You end up with a mess and it has got our name against it a long time after the urgency of the deadline is forgotten by the client. There is a time to say no, because it is just not achievable. Generally, retail is quite fast moving and with a fast turnaround.

Interviewer: Apart from retail clients, are there other clients that are more difficult to work with?

Employee A: I think the biggest industry difficulty that we have had has been with a P.R. company. We have a marketing agency that we have done a lot of work with, like to work with and work very well with, and who has worked for some big clients. We have done press releases for another agency, where they are predominantly for web-release. They are usually on extremely tight deadlines, and they are very highly technical. In effect, you have got the worst of all combinations. You have got extreme speed and you have got highly technical, and it is extremely difficult to work in a way that fits. Again, if you had lots of repeat business all of the time, it gets easier, because you develop a team of translators who are familiar with a client, with the terminology, but if every job is fifty pounds and you might only get a few, it is not really worth it.

Interviewer: Is there a protocol of how you deal with clients?

Employee A: I don't know what you would mean by protocol.

Interviewer: An established way of how you would contact them, or how often you spoke to them?

Employee A: We do not have a formal system and we tend to react to client need. We do proactively phone clients, but I know I do not like the sales phone call, that 'it's your three-monthly phone call'. I find, with people selling to us, that I do not like it. I think the kind of clients that we have, if they are a big client, and there is regular contact, then there is probably not a systematic follow-up, but there is constant communication with the client.

For instance, we have got a craft kit manufacturer in Leicestershire, who we typically do one order a year with, sometimes less. There is no point talking to them at other times. They know where we are. We do all the work they need, but they have a very limited need. Systematically, every year or so, there is a new order.

Interviewer: Do particular members of staff deal with certain clients?

Employee A: Yes. What we tend to do, particularly with larger accounts, is that there will be an individual member of staff that they tend to deal with.

Interviewer: What do you believe are the key factors to a successful business relationship?

Employee A: Win-win is the simple answer. If there is no profit in the work, there is no point. We clearly have to get something out of it. It has to be profitable to us, work that we can obviously do to a good standard, and we would need to be able to meet client requirements, in particular, cost, speed and quality. Responsiveness is also really important. We cannot have emails sat there for a long time unattended. One of the keys is to respond promptly when clients enquire.

Interviewer: How do you ask for client feedback?

Employee A: We do not do it systematically. For testimonials, what we tend to do is grab them when they come. For instance [Client] sent a job yesterday and the client sent a very effusive email back saying 'wonderful service, thanks very much', and that is the point at which we ask if we can use that as a testimonial. Most people will say yes, unless there is a confidentiality reason why they cannot. In most circumstances they will say 'Yes, OK'.

Interviewer: Who is your most valuable customer and why?

Employee A: Our next customer. We do not value particularly by order size, because, for example, we have got a private client for whom we have translated the birth certificate every time she has had a baby. It is not very high value work and not very frequent. It transpires that she is a Senior Official at the EU in Brussels, so although it is work for a private individual, they may potentially have influence that could get us significant work in the future. You never know who you are dealing with. We always instil in our staff that every job is important.

Having said that, you always have some clients I would categorise as thieves, who want something for nothing. You have to be wise to that. I did a website quote last week and the quote was around twenty thousand pounds in value, and the client came back and said that we could have the order that afternoon if we could do it for ten. I do not play that game. If we could do it for ten, it is because we have over-priced, which we have not. There would have been discounts to have, because there would have been repetition with the work, but they were not really playing the game. If they send us the text, which they will have because they have just written all the new content for a new website, we would be quite happy to sign a confidentiality agreement and we could give them a very accurate price. With e-commerce sites, you quite often get repetition of content, but he was being so ridiculous.

Interviewer: A pricing game?

Employee A: Yes, and actually you do not want a client like that, because they are not going to value your service. That can happen. Sometimes, clients do not really understand what they are asking for, so part of the skill is to understand the client and understand what it is that they need. There can a tendency to think that it is vaguely language-related, therefore Better Languages®.

For instance, we having a conversation with a regular client and they have got some issues about legal compliance. We are not a compliance specialist and we do not claim to be. Yes, it is language-related, but, essentially, there are new EU rules coming out about nutrition on labelling and he is asking our advice. We cannot really advise on what should and should not be included, because that is a legal issue, but from a translation point of view, we translate nutritional information for clients all the time, so, whilst it is not a big deal for us, it is a big deal for the client. It is about understanding it and, obviously, if we can help, or point them in the right direction, then we will. It may actually be a case that we cannot advise on it, but compliance advice is available with companies that offer that service.

Interviewer: Who have you worked with the longest?

Employee A: We have got two label companies, [Client] and the other one is [Client]. They go back to the 1980s, so long before any of us were involved with this business. They are our two longest-standing clients, by some margin.

Interviewer: Why do you think this is?

Employee A: The original core business was translating clothing labels. We have worked with them for a long time.

Interviewer: Do you think that trust is important for a translation agency in client relationships, and what does trust mean?

Employee A: That is a big one. Trust is absolutely vital. Talking to [Client] last week, we were talking about brand, and what they were saying is that brand is absolutely everything for them, so it needs to be right, well-presented and professional. Well, that is our approach too. We want to work with clients that have that value, because then we can do a professional service. Would we really want to work with a client who does not care about the quality of translation? Probably not. Everybody can see examples of packaging coming out of China that has really poor English on it. That gives a really bad impression of the company. In a situation like that, if they do not care, they can probably source cheaper and they are not going to value our service. I think we are very clear that we are at the quality end of the market.

Interviewer: Have you ever had a client who has switched to a different agency and then returned to you?

Employee A: All the time. One of the issues there is that a lot of large companies use more than one agency. The tendency is that they will perceive specialism in a field. Sometimes they do not have a strategic view of translation, so different departments within the organisation may just have happened to find a different agency at different times, so that is a factor. We are often perceived as specialist. For instance, most of our large clients, such as [Client X, Y, Z] (Z who we still supply for clothing labels), all perceive us as a specialist provider. When we talked to [Client Z] about food, one of our key areas of work, it was very hard to get over the barrier, because they still perceived us as a specialist in clothing, so that can be where it is more difficult. However much we say it, 'This is our main specialism, look at who we work with and look at what we do', we could not get them and they are using another agency for food.

Interviewer: Do some clients have one company for all their needs?

Employee A: They do, particularly larger companies and, inevitably, they tend to gravitate towards larger agencies. That is where it is competitive. With [Client X] for instance, I know when we tendered two years ago one of the competitors was Lionbridge®, the third largest agency in the world. Our turnover that year was about a hundred and fifty thousand, which we were quite pleased about at that stage. Their turnover was four hundred and fifty million. What the client interestingly said is, 'I don't know who we will choose, but it won't be them. They are too big. They do not value our account'. I think they were looking at a half a million pound contract at the time and they said that they did not care.

That can be one of the dilemmas. I think what we offer is a very tailored service, which is very specific to retail, our biggest area of work. We value our accounts, so we look after it. The client definitely gets value.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Appendix C

Interview with Company A

Company A: Good afternoon. [redacted] speaking.

Interviewer: Hi, my name is Laura Aitken and I am a student at the University of Nottingham, and your details were passed onto me by Mike Hunter at Better Languages. I am undertaking a research project as part of my Masters that explores Better Languages' client relationships.

Company A: OK.

Interviewer: So, I am looking to speak to a few of their clients, so I was wondering if it was possible to take a few moments of your time to ask you a few questions for my research?

Company A: Yes, sure. How long do you think it will take?

Interviewer: About five minutes; ten minutes max.

Company A: Yeah, sure. OK.

Interviewer: Is it possible to do that now?

Company A: Yes, OK.

Interviewer: Brilliant. Just before I begin I would like to make you aware that it is all confidential and this is just for the University and the research that I am doing will not be published.

Company A: Sure.

Interviewer: Could you briefly tell me about your company's translation needs?

Company A: We have a catalogue in English and because we have got European customers, such as German and French speaking, they really need a translation of our catalogue product descriptions. As an additional service, we provide that to them, to make it easier for them to choose our products. Sometimes, we need translations for product labels, for our products. That would, obviously, be just a few words per label, but they could be in all sorts of languages, Arabic for instance, where it is very important to get it right. Those would be smaller jobs, but nonetheless just as important. It is mainly those two areas where we need translations.

Interviewer: Do you use Better Languages for all of your translation needs, or do you also work with other agencies?

Company A: There was one other agency that we used. I am not quite sure, because I am not the only one who has used them. The person who used to use the other one has just left, but going forward, I think we are just using Better Languages. We might make comparisons with other agencies, because that is what you have to do, just in case they overcharge you. Obviously you need to make them aware of that and, if they cannot match it, then go with someone else. They are our main translation agency, definitely.

Interviewer: What do you think of Better Languages? What kind of company is it?

Company A: Very good. A very good, professional firm, very responsive, get back to us very quickly, very reliable, very friendly; only positive things, really.

Interviewer: Can you tell me how the business relationship was started?

Company A: I don't know. We were already using them when I first needed to have a contact, so it was passed on to me by a colleague in my company. I don't know how she got hold of them. She has left now, so I cannot ask her.

Interviewer: That is fine. Don't worry. Have there been any projects with Better Languages, where you have found it especially satisfying or dissatisfying?

Company A: Any what, sorry?

Interviewer: Any projects that you remember as being especially satisfying?

Company A: When they tell me it will take four days, it takes four days, so we have always been quite pleased with their punctuality, time-keeping. I remember, a little while ago, there was an issue with some French translations, where the translator had used words that my French colleague just did not recognise, but they worked quite pro-actively when we asked them to change it to this word, because we don't know that word, and they changed it all for me.

Interviewer: So, there was no problem after that?

Company A: No, no there wasn't.

Interviewer: OK, so are you satisfied with the service that you are receiving from Better Languages?

Company A: Yes, we are.

Interviewer: What do you think makes a successful business relationship, in more general terms?

Company A: Honesty, reliability, obviously quite a valued relationship. They need to be competitive with others as well, and obviously the quality of what they translate. I am German, so I can proof-read the German translation; my colleague is French and can proof-read the French translation, which is great, but we do not have all the languages in-house, so, we trust them. So far, so good. No-one has come back with any complaints. They are very good and the quality of the service is very good.

Interviewer: Would you recommend them to other companies?

Company A: Yes.

Interviewer: My last question is why do you think the relationship with Better Languages has lasted as long as it has?

Company A: Because they provide a good service and they are very friendly and reliable.

Interviewer: OK, that is brilliant. Thank you very much for taking some of your time to speak to me today.

Company A: No problem. Good luck with your work.

Interviewer: Thanks very much. Bye.

Company A: Bye.