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PATRICIA MAY, PRECISION LANGUAGE SERVICES, ON TRANSLATING THE WORLD'S CULTURES

"I see the world getting smaller and smaller. Hello — we're not the only people at the table."

— PATRICIA MAY, Precision Language Services

[3 questions]

FOR PATRICIA MAY

- 1 | Which is more important, talent or experience?** The balance in translation moves a little more toward experience, but without talent you'll never rise above the mediocre.
- 2 | Money or ideas?** If you don't have the money, how can you implement the idea?
- 3 | What's one thing they should have told you, about being an entrepreneur?** You're never done. You just get it down, then you get an idea.

Patricia May, president and CEO of Precision Language Services in Lakeville, moves documents from any one language to any other language using the services of 2,500 translators. Along the way, the woman fluent in German and Russian gleans insights about cultures around the world.

"MY GRANDFATHER was a German immigrant. Because of the wars he couldn't speak German in the home with his children, but then his grandchildren came along. I grew up speaking a type of German with him...

I studied in the Soviet Union when it was the Soviet Union. It's a different world. We had a speaker in the women's dormitory. The speaker would turn on and say [she speaks in Russian, then translates]: 'GOOD MORNING CITIZENS. IT'S 6 A.M. WAKE UP.'

Our instructor, she would take us out by the river where there was wind. She said she didn't think there was anyone listening but just in case.

The Vietnam War intervened. My husband was in the Air Force. The feeling was, married couples got a safer assignment. I had an elderly aunt who said, 'The university will be here when you get back. You can finish your education then.' So I got married and went with my husband. It took a long time to finish my degree.

I wanted to use my work as a translator. One day someone said, 'Can you do Spanish?' And I said, 'My company can do anything for you,' which wasn't completely far from the truth. Just gradually we became a company and off we went.

We move documents from any one language to any other language, for private

individuals, corporations. We're certified with the state of Minnesota, do work for the counties. The Hmong and Somali that you see on the Web sites, that's us.

We use independent contractors. That was a business decision. There's two ways to do this in the industry. You can hire translators, but then they're generic. But I wanted to match the language, area of expertise, and the interest. I have about 2,500 translators in our database.

We work for many large corporations. We just received a wonderful letter of recommendation from the Washington Group doing work in Iraq: Arabic-to-English translation for the rebuilding of dams. We do work for hospitals and clinics, attorneys involved in patent litigation.

People walk in and give us a driver's license and they say, 'If you do good we'll give you another one.' There's no profit in that, but this is something we do because somebody helped my grandfather. So when immigrants come to our door we help.

We do a lot of Somali translation. Because Somalia hasn't had an infrastructure for at least two, three decades, the language itself lacks infrastructure. It doesn't have form, spelling and grammar. Schools 30 miles apart aren't teach-

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