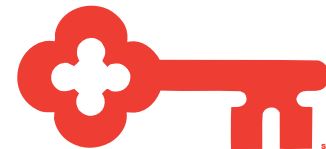


Key Companies



Affordable Language Services helps clients bridge the language divide

In some ways Blue Ash-based Affordable Language Services is unrecognizable from the shoestring operation CEO Lynn Elfers founded in her home 19 years ago, but in other ways the company, now one of the 30 largest language service providers in North America, remains unchanged.

Elfers' inspiration for Affordable Language Services was loosely based on a medical emergency she experienced in Costa Rica in the late 1990s. Elfers, who was pregnant at the time, was rushed to the hospital with a life threatening condition. Although she is fluent in Spanish, Elfers was in too much pain to speak cogently in Spanish, so a bilingual friend communicated with her medical team on her behalf. "I was screaming in pain in the emergency room and someone advocated for me," she says. "Every time we can do that for a patient or a school child or a parent, it almost feels like we're doing a public service. We were founded on the belief that helping people is the right thing to do."

But while the company's mission remains unchanged, it has grown tremendously in scale and sophistication. When Elfers founded the company she chose the name because it started with "A" and she wanted to be near the front in the Yellow Pages.

"Someone once asked me what my business plan was and I said, 'Customers call, and I answer the phone.'"

That may sound rudimentary, but Elfers' habit of answering the phone 24/7 cemented her reputation, particularly with



hospitals needing emergency interpreters in the middle of the night.

In time Elfers received requests for other languages, and she got licensed by a Washington state firm to train her team as medical interpreters. To date the company, which holds an ISO 9001 certification, has trained more than 900 medical interpreters.

Elfers' unflagging commitment to customer service explains why the 36-person firm now ranks as the 27th largest language service provider in North America, according to Common Sense Advisory, a market research firm. Affordable Language Services' 600 contractors, who collectively speak more than 130 different languages, provide interpreting services at between 3,000 and 4,000 medical, school, social service and legal appoint-

ments each month, Elfers says. In addition, the company provides a broad array of translation services.

"Every company that wants to sell to the world is translating their web site and their offerings into more and more languages," she says Elfers.

Those trends explain why Affordable Language Services experienced 14 percent year-over-year growth in September, expects to grow its internal staff by 12 to 15 workers over the next three years, and recently added a staffing division, Fusion Talent, to assist clients seeking to hire bilingual and professional staff on a longer-term basis.

"We really want to be known as the world's No. 1 language provider," Elfers says. "We want to be the most trusted provider for our business partners."

BANK NOTES



Amy McFarland

Relationship
Manager
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Let Biases Be Bygones

October is National Women in Small Business Month, and the numbers show incredible strides have been made by women in our workforce. Today, more than 11-million businesses are women-owned. More than half of the U.S. workforce is made up by women, but by no means are we finished making progress. At KeyBank, we've invested ourselves into Key4Women to bring women business leaders together to continue making progress.

When starting a business, most entrepreneurs need investors to turn their vision into a reality. According to recent data from KeyBank, most business owners are confident in their financial health, but when looking for outside investment, studies show investors ask men and women different questions. Men are typically asked 'promotion' oriented questions while women are faced with more 'prevention' oriented questions. The study results presume women must focus on the potential downside while men can put their energy toward growth.

This is changing. Women in leadership positions and sponsors who advocate are overcoming the misperceptions and subtle biases about women in business. More confident women in business are already leading examples and serving as catalyst for the next generation of women in business.

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