



LANGUAGE AND UNDERSTANDING

TWO KEYS TO OFFSHORE SUCCESS

Retail systems experts PMC operates an India-based subsidiary - PMC India (PMC-I), providing medium-sized UK retailers with an offshore service that combines retail industry specialisation with offshore cost savings. It's also designed to help them avoid the problems and inefficiencies in traditional offshore solutions.

Paul Mason, CEO, PMC, believes that as well as applying a retail-focus it's important to understand the impact of language on the relationship.

Mason states: "With offshore solutions there is always a language difference. It's true that many people in offshore companies speak English. However, there are wide differences between the English needed for a social conversation and that needed to conduct an IT-based business meeting. It's not just the existence of the two and three letter acronyms that populate IT either, it's phrases that cause confusion. For example, talk to the team at your offshore provider and find out how many of them know what 'low hanging fruit' means."

"Language issues can be significant and some offshore providers pay little attention to its importance. Many western-based organisations find that Indians can attach surprising interpretations to western expressions. Such as: *'Let's not eat the whole elephant in one go'* and the instruction to: *'Take everything in bite-sized chunks'*. In the UK, we use those and many similar expressions liberally without thinking because we know the person across the table knows what we mean. However, if you intend to liaise with a manager, analyst, and programmer on the other end of a telephone on the other side of the world it's important that they can pass the conference call test."

Take India as a classic example, many graduates in India study, learn and sit exams in English. However, that doesn't mean they can manage a conference call, discussing retail IT issues and understand every nuance of the conversation. There are issues of accent, speed, and figures of speech – and it works both ways. Many people in the UK think the French and Italians speak quickly. Interestingly, most Indians think most people in the UK speak English incredibly quickly. It's usually too fast and contains far too many colloquialisms.

Breaking down the communication barriers

Mason continues: "With PMC-I we began with communication in mind. We teach our teams about retail but we also help them practice their written and oral English. We run a 'buddy' system, so each member of our Indian team has someone in the UK they talk to and email once a week. The job of the 'buddy' is to correct their English and help them understand the detail of the language – with a special bias towards retail. This has improved their English significantly, both written and oral. The team's confidence, understanding and their ability to compose written documents has improved."

Of course, teaching someone that thinks they know English can meet initial resistance. The reaction is often: 'I've been to university, got two degrees, and all in English. Why are you making me learn English again?' However, when people recognise the need to understand specific retail industry-based English and pass that early resistance, they soon see the improvements.

Mason confirms: "It quickly became clear how much better our Indian team communicated with their UK colleagues and with their clients. They quickly got behind the programme, understanding that effective communication builds strong teams."

"Before you enter any offshore relationship ask about overcoming language issues and if you're told they're not important think again."

To find out more about PMC's Offshore Solutions and Services please visit www.paulmasonconsulting.co.uk or contact PMC on 01235 521900