

Business Start-Ups

Smart Ideas From **Entrepreneur**

SMART PICKS

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10 top businesses for 1998



Intermark Language Services Corp. founder Tom West translates his fluency in foreign languages into a profitable business.

Hot Resources:

American Translators Association, (703) 683-6100
Entrepreneur's Language Translation Start-Up Guide #1353, (800) 421-2300

Thinking of launching a business in 1998 but not sure what's hot? Successful companies solve problems. So what's the biggest problem people face today? Lack of time. Whether they're working parents striving to keep the family on an even keel or seniors wanting to fulfill lifelong dreams, everyone seems to be caught up in a time crunch. If you start a business that offers relief from round-the-clock pressures, like those we're showcasing here, you'll be in on a trend that shows no signs of abating.

Translating

As worldwide commerce continues to flourish, so does the need for experienced translators who can create a level playing field of language for business. So it's no surprise the market for skilled translators is hot-

ter than ever; Walter Bocak, executive director of the American Translators Association in Alexandria, Virginia, reports that association membership has tripled since 1990.

Tom West started his company when he uncovered a niche in the translation market just waiting to be

filled. While working as an attorney at the largest law firm in Atlanta, West and his colleagues sent legal documents out to be translated at local agencies. But because of his experience with international transactions and his background in foreign languages—West holds a bachelor's degree in French, a master's degree in German and a minor in Russian—he continually noticed errors in the work they received.

"Almost without exception," West explains, "I found the translations we got back were just atrocious, be-

cause the documents were so full of legalese that untrained translators just couldn't get things right." So in 1995, West decided to do it better himself and started Intermark Language Services Corp., an Atlanta firm that specializes in translating foreign legal documents for attorneys. Now sales are hot and only show signs of getting hotter; since April 1997, busi-

ness has tripled, mostly due to word-of-mouth advertising within the international legal community.

Spanish translating accounts for about 70 percent of the company's current assignments—whether it's English into Spanish or Spanish into English—while assignments in German, French and, occasionally, Dutch are also accepted. West hires

independent contractors, many of whom have low degrees from other countries, to do the translations.

"Once the documents are translated into English, I can go through them and work with the translator to make sure they're written the way a lawyer would have written them," says West. "Legal systems differ, but common sense prevails around the world."

