



# Hablando Español Puede Ayudar a Mejorar Su Negocio

*(Speaking Spanish Can Help Improve Your Business)*

## TALK International Helps Car Dealerships Boost Sales and Expand Market Share.

By Patricia Weist and  
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**THE SUPPLIER:**  
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In a world characterized by ethnic and linguistic diversity—where language skills and cultural understanding have become critical to commercial success—Fort Lauderdale-based language school TALK International is constantly implementing new strategies to help its customers achieve increased sales and market expansion.

TALK International's mission is “to help create a world where communication, understanding, cooperation, and respect exist between people of all countries and cultures.” In today's global market, increased linguistic and cross-cultural communication translates into greater prosperity and commercial success for those corporations willing to devote time and resources to achieve this goal.

In South Florida, as in many parts of the United States, Spanish is the second most important language for conducting business, behind English. The following facts make a good case for why

business people in all sectors should learn Spanish if they wish to grow their businesses.

According to the United States Census Bureau, the number of Hispanics in the United States today totals more than 38 million. While the total U.S. population increased by only 13.2 percent between 1990 and 2000, the Hispanic population in the United States, during the same period, increased by 57.9 percent. Currently, one in five babies born in this country is Hispanic. But the United States Hispanic population is expected to triple over the next 50 years—by 2050, one in four Americans will be Hispanic.

The Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia estimates that 82 percent of Hispanic households have a household income of \$50,000 or more. In 2007, the estimated buying power of Hispanics was \$926.1 billion, which means that their purchasing power has increased by 118

percent in the last 10 years. In fact, Hispanic household incomes are growing at twice the national average.

Hispanics are an extremely brand-loyal group of consumers. They tend to be less influenced by special offers from competitors once they have chosen where to conduct business and what products to buy. While most customers are highly sensitive to the individual salesperson they do business with, this is especially true for Hispanics. In the Hispanic culture, relationships tend to be more important than institutions, and business deals rise and fall on businesses that take the time to cultivate these all-important customer-client relationships.

In the field of car sales, it is a well-known fact that Spanish-speaking customers prefer to purchase their vehicles from a Spanish-speaking salesperson. Hispanics who have little or no English language skills often feel very uncomfortable conducting business with someone with whom they cannot communicate. Hispanics who have a working knowledge of English tend to gravitate toward those who “speak their language,” both linguistically and culturally.

Local automobile dealerships have cited a high cost in lost sales because of the language and cultural barriers that typically separate their salesforce from potential Hispanic customers.

With these facts in mind, TALK International set out last year to provide its automobile dealership clientele with the necessary tools to effectively connect with the Hispanic market and thus dramatically increase their sales. To this end, TALK created a customized program called “Spanish for Car Dealerships,” which is aimed at teaching Spanish to employees at car dealerships and teaching them how to better relate culturally to their Hispanic clients. Since its implementation in April 2007, this program is currently being used by many car dealerships.

TALK’s team of language experts began by researching existing Spanish teaching materials that would be appropriate for car dealerships. The team found that almost no materials of this type were readily available. TALK’s cur-

riculum developers immediately went to work to put together a curriculum that would address basic Spanish skills and at the same time incorporate the language and vocabulary used in the car business.

The result was an innovative curriculum based on a simple but effective core textbook and supplemented by glossaries of industry-specific vocabulary, including different types of vehicles, the parts of a car, basic business Spanish, and some common customer service and sales expressions. At the same time, the curriculum developers put together some basic information on cultural differences between Anglos and other Americans and those of Hispanic origin. This unique training program directly addresses the needs of car dealerships, saving them both time and money.

In planning its language courses, TALK International selects the best core textbooks. It then supplements these materials with audiovisual and kinesthetic aids to address visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles to make the learning process more complete. TALK’s materials include audio CDs, video clips, PowerPoint presentations, dialogues, and hands-on activities where students practice newly acquired language skills in real-life situations.

However, even the most carefully planned program will fall flat if entrusted to the wrong trainer. With this in mind, TALK International chose its best instructors to teach the program. Knowledgeable and experienced teachers with a pleasing demeanor were trained to deliver this important program.

In the program, participants are taught the basic skills needed for interacting with their customers—from greeting them at the door to understanding the spelling of their names and what type of vehicle they are interested in purchasing. Participants immediately begin to use the language structures and vocabulary. Often they practice different scenarios in class and then immediately go out and use them in their day-to-day interaction with their customers.

“I was able to use what I learned in class immediately,” says one participant. Another added, “It’s amazing how

much more comfortable I feel facing our Hispanic customers.”

Participants must complete a detailed placement test before attending the class. This test determines the exact level of each student’s language proficiency, which helps TALK International place students in a class at the appropriate skill level. The test consists of three parts: a multiple-choice grammar component, in which the company’s language experts gauge to what extent prospective students are familiar with core language structures; a writing sample, in which TALK determines written proficiency in the language; and an oral interview.

Once the program starts, TALK International has certain procedures in place to ensure that the quality of the program is upheld. First, a program coordinator is assigned to monitor the progress of each course. These coordinators observe the Spanish classes several times, and have students and HR employees provide feedback on the classes. Mid-term and final exams are administered to monitor participants’ progress.

This program has given employees at car dealerships the ability to communicate with Hispanic clients. This has led to increased visibility in the market as well as increased sales.

Managers also point to increased morale among members of their sales teams and greater unity and cooperation between them. TALK International is planning to develop similar programs for other sectors of the economy.

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