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FINDS NICHE: Huiping Iler runs a business to business translation company specializing in English - Chinese but working in more than 100 languages.

Canwest News Service photo

Huiping Iler unlocks 'localization' potential

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FOR CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

A few years ago, emissaries from the California winery Kendall-Jackson met with restaurateurs in China.

Pouring a glass of pinot noir, the Kendall representative described the wine as having hints of strawberry. He was met with blank looks; no one in his audience had ever tasted the fruit. The company went back to the drawing board to adapt its descriptors to the Chinese palate.

The strawberry analogy is one a myriad of missteps companies can make when they troll international markets for customers.

With more and more North American businesses expanding their reach using websites, Huiping Iler saw a niche waiting to be filled. She was living in Windsor in 1998 when she started Wintranslation.com to translate corporate websites and adapt them to other cultures.

Her company has done work for

heavyweight clients like Maple Leaf Foods and Caterpillar, and Iler is a sought-after speaker.

Iler, 33, formerly Huiping Zhang, learned about cultural adaptation first-hand.

After growing up near Heng Yang, an industrial city in southern China, she left on a scholarship to study communications at the University of Windsor.

At the top of her class in China, Iler had a tough time at Windsor. She had never used a computer, didn't grasp Canadian cultural references, and had to learn a different style of reasoning and writing.

"It was a huge struggle," she said.

But the transition gave Iler a leg-up when it came to understanding cross-cultural differences.

So after graduation and working at a few clerical jobs, Iler launched her own translation business from home.

Her initial clients included people who needed to translate official docu-

ments like marriage certificates.

The immigration section of the Canadian Consulate General in Detroit was her first important corporate client.

While Iler did some Chinese-to-English translation, she hired freelance translators for most of the work. She has focused on the business side.

In 1999, Iler's business took a turn when she won a contract from Planet Intra Inc. (now called Vialect) to translate and adapt the documentation and user interface for a software program for the company's office in Germany. From then on, Iler expanded her expertise in "localization," or adapting websites for foreign markets or users from different cultures.

"A lot of firms have the chance to use the Internet to go global, to get international customers," Iler said. "Sometimes translation is not enough, you have to culturally adapt the content."

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