

business consultant and self-defence trainer Mark Wingfield talks to Robin Johnson over lunch

AS the British summer is proving somewhat unpredictable this year, most of us are plotting an escape for a week or two in sunnier climes.

But having a holiday in a foreign country always tends to highlight something that, as Brits, we should all feel a little ashamed about.

Sitting on the terrace outside a bar, you catch the waiter's attention and instead of asking for two beers in his native tongue – out of pure laziness, it comes out in English.

But in business, conquering the language barrier is crucial – particularly if you want to sell them something.

For Mark Wingfield, having a second language, and a third on standby in case of emergencies, has helped his career enormously.

Mark, of Melbourne, is managing director of his own company, MW Sigma, based at the iD Centre at the RTC Business Park, in London Road, Derby.

When considering what he wanted to do in life, Mark wanted to combine business with a desire to learn a second language.

His course in business studies included a chance to work in Germany – and he relished the opportunity, even though he was rather thrown in at the deep end.

"On day one when I started at this company in Germany the boss said that I was not to speak any English while on the premises," said Mark, who joined me for lunch at the Buddha restaurant in Queen Street.

"And the staff were told not to talk to me in English. It was very tough to begin with but after a couple of months, I was fluent in German.

"The real indication of that was when I went to a function in Munich. I was talking to this guy and he asked what part of Germany I was from.

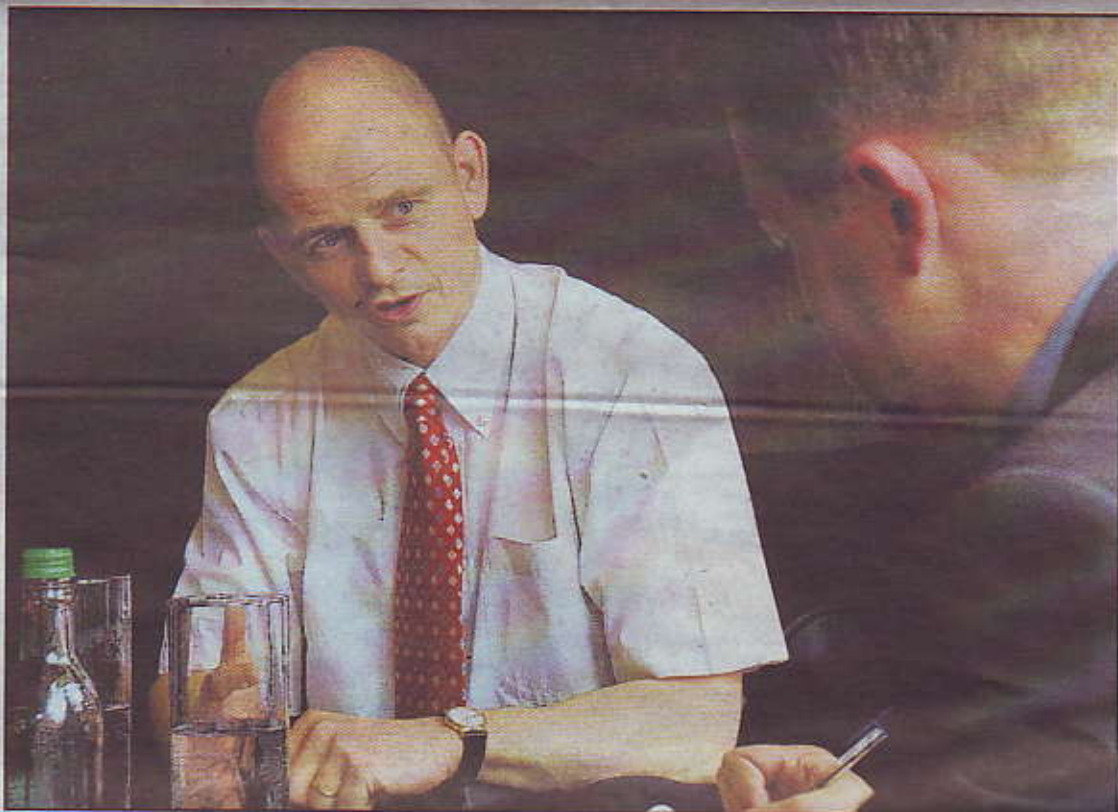
"I explained that I was British and he didn't believe me until I started talking to him in English. He even said that I'd picked up a regional accent in my German!"

Mark eventually returned to the UK to complete his course and start work. But his first couple of jobs did not take him further than the north of England – where, in some parts, the language is equally difficult to understand.

Mark ended up working for Monroe Europe (UK), most famous for producing shock absorbers, helping to develop its brand and increase sales.

However, foreign travel was back on the agenda when Mark joined JCB as export sales manager. The job took him across Europe – and was a real eye-opener for him.

"My German was still abso-



lutely fine and I could just about get by with my French," he said. "But it was when I went to countries like Spain that I struggled.

"Some of the people I did business with did not speak a word of English. But the good thing about having a second and third language is that although they may not speak English, they may speak another of your languages.

"For example, one guy I met in Spain didn't speak English but his secretary spoke French, so we got by.

"It makes a huge difference to the working relationship if you make the effort. I remember when I was in the Czech Republic and I said 'good morning' to my business contact there in Czech and he had a big smile on his face.

"It was only 'good morning' but it showed that I was making the effort, which counts for a lot."

"I knew nothing about Derbyshire before I arrived. But we fell in love with Melbourne and have always felt very much at home there. We are still there today and it is probably the longest amount of time I've spent in any one place."

After working for Allen Group and Caterpillar, early last year he set up his own international sales and marketing consultancy, MW Sigma.

His clients include a Swedish company that manufactures construction equipment, which Mark promotes in France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Italy and Denmark.

As a result, he is still jetting around Europe but in that respect, moving to Derbyshire proved something of a blessing in disguise.

"I said 'good morning' to my business contact in Czech and he had a big smile on his face. It was only 'good morning' but it showed I was making the effort, which counts for a lot."

"The infrastructure here is excellent," he said. "East Midlands Airport has really grown and it now provides flights to so many destinations."

Outside of work, Mark has been a keen martial arts enthusiast for over 20 years and is a black belt in wado ryu karate.

After a chat with his friend Mark Rotherham, also a black belt, who has been running self-defence classes for many years,

the two men hatched the idea of running training courses, which can be used as team-building exercises, specifically to protect business people. Late last year, Mark set up Max Conflict Management, which he also runs from his MW Sigma offices.

The training offered can apply to men and women, young and old, in all work situations – health staff in hospitals who may have to deal with drunken or aggressive patients or who pay home visits, solicitors who may have awkward clients, teachers, shop workers and petrol-filling station assistants, and those whose work makes them targets for pressure groups.

Other people facing dangers are those who have to travel at night and people using multi-storey or underground car parks.

"People can avoid threatening situations by learning to be more observant and watching for danger signals such as concealed weapons," said Mark.

"We also teach people how to respond to a threatening situation, for example, at a cash-point.

"It's very enjoyable work. I certainly think that if you are doing something which you have a genuine interest in yourself, it makes it a far more enjoyable career in the long term."

CV: MARK WINGFIELD

BORN in Essex, Mark attended local schools before studying for a business studies degree at Leeds Business School in 1988. The course included work placements in Germany. Mark then went into business with a friend and set up

Climax Design Europa in 1991. The following year, he joined Monroe Europe (UK) as district manager for the north-east and moved to Gateshead. In 1994, he was promoted to northern regional manager at Monroe. In 1996, Mark went into export sales with

Rocester-based JCB and ended up living in Melbourne. In 1998, he joined Allen Group as sales development manager, a job which allowed him to work from home. He then went on to work for Caterpillar in Leicestershire. In 2006, he decided to set up

MW Sigma, based in the iD Centre, Derby. Mark is also a martial arts enthusiast and has also set up Max Conflict Management, which teaches people self-defence and how to avoid confrontation. Today, Mark still lives in Melbourne with his wife and two daughters.