

BUSINESS ENGLISH

These units are intended for German-speaking students who wish to improve their command of Business English. They are the result of my teaching at various universities, consultancies or companies. All units are freely available for study but copyright.

Abbreviations used are: **e.g.** = *exempli gratia* (Latin), for example, for instance, and **i.e.** = *id est* (Latin), that is, that means. German translations are usually in brackets.

A good tool to support your studies is the *24/7 BBC Worldservice*, also available on Internet radio. In particular programmes such as *Business Daily* and *Newshour* are excellent means to improve your command of English, as well as for learning more about the culture of English-speaking countries.

Two recommendable books for Business English are *Words for Business – Lernwörterbuch Wirtschaftsenglisch* by H. Geisen and D. Hamblock, published by Cornelsen, and *The Economist Style Guide*, published by the magazine *The Economist*, (www.economist.com), which is also highly recommendable for business studies.

Unit 1: The Forms of Business

It is a good way to start Business English with a look at the different types or forms of business in use today. The smallest form is the **sole trader** (Kleinunternehmer, 1-Mann Betrieb) where just one person runs the business and is responsible for everything. Watch the word **sole** here, it can mean **only** (as in the **sole** or **only proprietor** = *der einzige Besitzer*), the only one, but also the sole of your foot or shoe (Sohle), and should not be confused with the homophone **soul** (Seele). A sole trader can be somebody owning a taxi or a small shop.

The next type is the **partnership**, which means two or more people are involved who all share responsibilities and hence profits and losses. This is often symbolised by the use of the sign **&** (= and, called **ampersand**) in the name, such as Johnson & Sons in the case of a family company, or Williams & Johnson if the owners are not **related** (= *verwandt*). Lawyers, consultants or doctors often use this type of business model.

Dealers (Händler), **retailers** (Wiederverkäufer, Einzelhändler) and **wholesalers** (Grosshändler) are further types of business. It is important to note here that a dealer buys used goods from the public and sells them again, as well as selling new products to the public. Retailers and wholesalers do normally not buy from the public, they only buy fresh **produce** (= agricultural goods such as fruits or vegetables) or new **products** (= objects) directly from a **farmer** (Landwirt), **producer** or **manufacturer** (Hersteller).

Small to medium-sized companies are mostly **Ltds** which stands for **limited liability company** (Firma mit begrenzter Haftung) and is the best translation for – or equivalent to – the German GmbH. They have to produce an annual **company report** (Geschäftsbericht) and are a **legal entity** (juristische Körperschaft/Person). In some countries such as Australia they are called a **pty** which stands for **proprietary company**. Both forms are – in contrast to a **Plc** – not open to the public, i.e. the public cannot buy shares or invest otherwise in such companies.

The biggest companies with **factories** or **production/manufacturing plants** (Fabriken) are usually listed on the stock market and are called **Plcs** or **Public Limited Companies**. They are also called **listed company** (börsennotierte Firma) and are open to the public, i.e. people can buy shares of such a company. In the US these two types of business are called **close corporation** (= Ltd.) and **open corporation** (= Plc).

Another important business model are **franchises**: you buy a license to use somebody else's business model or idea, e.g. fast food chains or sunbeds. When you take out a **franchise** you are the **franchisee** or **franchise holder**, the person who invented the business idea is the **franchisor** and gets a **franchise fee** from the franchisee.

Big companies are often **global players**, i.e. they act internationally and have **headquarters** (**HQ** = the seat of administration = Hauptverwaltung, Firmensitz, Hauptquartier), **offices** or **branches** (Zweigstellen) in different countries. The word *headquarters* is always spelt with an *s* at the end and can be used with a singular or plural verb: *The headquarters of the Continental AG is/are in Hanover, Germany.*

They can also buy (or **acquire** = erwerben) other often smaller companies, or **merge** (fusionieren) with other companies. This is called **M&A** or **Mergers and Acquisitions**. When one company takes over another this can happen with the agreement of the target company, then it is called a **friendly takeover**

(freundliche Übernahme). If the company objects to - or fights against - being taken over, it is called a **hostile** (feindliche Übernahme) takeover. Do not confuse this word with the verb *to overtake*, that's what you do with your car on a road or motorway: *This morning I overtook a slow lorry on the motorway.*

Such big companies are often called **umbrella** or **parent companies**, or **holding company** (Dachgesellschaft, Beteiligungsgesellschaft, Holdinggesellschaft). The smaller company is called **subsidiary** or simply **daughter company** (Tochtergesellschaft). The word *subsidiary* for a daughter company is often confused with the expression **subsidy** (= financial support or aid) or **to subsidize**, so please take care here. The German word *Subvention* does not exist in English.

Translation is a fine exercise to improve your command of a language. Here are some sentences to be translated into English, the solutions can be found at the beginning of the next unit.

1 Gestern traf sich der Aufsichtsrat in München, um über die Übernahme zu beraten.

2 Mein Schwager hat einen Autohandel mit einem grossen Verkaufsraum.

3 Die Übernahme der französischen Firma entpuppte sich als schwierig.

4 Die EU hat neue Subventionen für die Landwirtschaft genehmigt.

5 Die Geschäftsform dieser Firma ist eine GmbH, sie hat ca 50 Mitarbeiter.