

Business

TUESDAY
February 25, 2003

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Translation firm rides out economy

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OAKLAND -- As award-winning translation and communications firm International Contact Inc. turns 20 years old, its celebration is sweet and sour.

It's sweet because the Oakland firm, run by the mother-and-daughter team of Norma Armon and Carla Itzkowich, has thrived for two decades, translating printed, audio and video materials into more than 70 languages.

It's a bit sour because the economic downturn has cut its business from tech firms, local governments and once-steady, \$100,000-a-year client PG&E.

International Contact's sales fell 17 percent to \$1 million in 2002, with the dip continuing into January, leading the 12-employee firm to trim to a four-day work week. But business has improved in February and it has extended its marketing efforts to spark a recovery.

"We're going to ride it out," Itzkowich said. "It doesn't take much of a boom to keep us going."

International Contact began by producing employee-training videos in Spanish. It boomed in the 1990s by translating materials into multiple languages for tech firms like Adobe Systems and Apple Computer. Then it diversified by adding clients in telecommunications, government and health care for projects from bill inserts to brochures.

Now it hopes to boost business by targeting companies such as those attending a big semiconductor show in March in China. "Translation is difficult," said Itzkowich, who speaks English, Spanish, French and Hebrew and can say thank you in most languages. While her firm has yet to have a big blunder, she collects those from others such as one for a Hong Kong dry cleaner that said: Ladies, drop your trousers here. "Language is an art," Itzkowich said.

International Contact can be reached at www.intlcontact.com or (510) 836-1180.



Norma Armon and
Carla Itzkowich celebrating

