

B.C. CONSULTING GROUP MAKES GOOD IN ASIA... WITH GOVERNMENT HELP

Getting a foothold in foreign markets is not always easy, especially in a totally different cultural environment such as Southeast Asia. This is where a little Canadian government help can come in very handy, as Hatfield Consultants Ltd. will acknowledge.

The small multi-million dollar environmental and aquaculture consulting company, established just over 20 years ago in West Vancouver, is currently doing half of its business overseas, with offices in Indonesia and Thailand.

Both joint ventures – set up five years ago in Indonesia and just this year in Thailand – have benefitted immensely from Canadian government help.

Embassy and CIDA Inc. backing
"We got established with Federal government risk-sharing and assistance," admits the company's President Christopher Hatfield.

This came in the form of financial assistance from the Industrial Cooperation Program (Inc.) administered by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), as well as help from the respective Canadian Embassies which were instrumental in establishing contacts with future partners and clients.

"We wouldn't be abroad without federal assistance," says Hatfield.

Why Southeast Asia?

Hatfield had always been very interested in the region and, what is even more important, the entire senior management of the company shared this attraction to what he calls "one of the most booming regions in the world."

But Hatfield is also quick to point out that "you need strong commitment from senior echelons of the company because of the uncertainty this market offers."

He agrees that it would be much easier to just head south of the border, but he is interested in diversifying his markets and not

putting all the eggs in one basket.

Hatfield also points out that working in international markets provides challenge to his staff of 50, and this challenge in turn has provided him with staff stability.

But he is quick to warn to "be prepared for darn hard work, be persistent, and don't expect results over the short term."

The company is obviously following this advice as its Indonesia joint venture is bringing in some \$750,000 in revenues a year, and even the recently-started Thailand operation is already earning some \$300,000.

Market advice

Countries in this region differ greatly from one-another, says Hatfield.

"Indonesia and Thailand are teeming with a lot of small business people and entrepreneurs ready to do business, which makes these markets very attractive," he says.

On the other hand, a country like Vietnam, where the company is just starting up, is still very much government-controlled, according to Hatfield, "but also very challenging because things are just opening up and it's a great time to get in on the ground floor."

He also describes Laos, where the company is already bidding on projects, as "a country with a lot of potential that is just now opening to the world, and therefore there is a lot less competition."

But Hatfield also cautions that "there is no real legal recourse in some of these countries, whose legal systems are poorly developed, and therefore there is a need to find good,

honest and reliable people to make sure you get paid.

"Things don't work the same way there as in North America," he warns, "so be prepared."

With over 15 years overseas experience and an office in Santiago, Chile as well – in keeping with his Pacific Rim interest – Hatfield again emphasizes the "excellent help, many contacts and good advice" he has received from Canadian Commercial Officers, "and which is there for the asking."

For more information on Hatfield Consultants Ltd. or The Hatfield Group of companies, contact Christopher Hatfield, President. Tel.: (604) 926-3261. Fax: (604) 926-5329.

Some other successful Canadian companies in Southeast Asia

Cougar Helicopters Inc., located at the Halifax International Airport, had its marketing efforts in Thailand rewarded last June with a multi-year contract to provide a dedicated Sikorsky S-76 medium-size all-weather helicopter for offshore support services to oil rigs. The 11-year old and 100 per cent Atlantic Canada-owned multi-million dollar company of 45 employees is also hoping that its two-year ongoing consultant relations in Malaysia will yield some positive results. According to Director of Flight Operations Bill Jones, Industry Canada has provided the company with some outstanding help in its marketing endeavours. Cougar also prides itself on holding the largest Canadian helicopter services contract in its joint venture with Helikopter Service of Norway for the Hibernia

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Successful