

SUCCESS STORIES

Top Drug and Explosives Detection Company Consolidates U.K. Market Share... Without a Blast

A unique, state-of-the-art product has catapulted Mississauga-based Barringer Research Ltd. into the world's top bomb and drug detection expert whose leading-edge detectors are now being used in over 35 countries.

Founded in 1961, it is only ten years ago that the medium-sized company switched from geophysics and started applying a unique idea from oil and gas exploration to drug and explosives detection.

First steps in the U.K.

Barringer's Vice President, Sales, David Martinak, recalls that the company's first customers in the U.K. back in 1990 were the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence — both still play a large role in evaluating new products and emerging technologies.

"But our most recent contracts in that country," he says, "include supplying, through the end of 1996, our IONSCANR explosive detector units to European Passenger Services Ltd. (EPSL) — which provides passenger rail service from the U.K. to the Continent via the Channel Tunnel."

The company had won, three years earlier, a similar contract worth over \$3 million with The Channel Tunnel Group Ltd. of London, for protecting the Eurotunnel — "one of the greatest engineering feats of the century" — on both the U.K. and French side.

"These contracts were won through a tight tendering process," recalls Martinak, "by beating out our main competitor — from the U.S.A."

How did Barringer, whose detectors are also found in many airports in the U.K. and other parts of the world, do it?

Quality and reputation

"What put us above the competition was not only price and quality," explains Martinak, "but especially equipment performance and reputation, as well as long-term costs."

When it comes to reputation, he also acknowledges the solid support received from the Canadian Commercial Corporation — "equivalent to Canadian Government backing," says Martinak who, occasionally, has plugged into other sources of help such as the Export Development Corporation (EDC), the former Ontario Development Corporation, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and the Program for Export Market Development at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT).

Barringer's IONSCANR 400 is now being used by drug interdiction and security agencies such as Canada Customs (capturing over \$60 million worth of illegal drugs since 1994), U.S. Customs, the FBI and French Rail Authorities.

Develop good contacts

"In many respects," says Martinak, "it is a small world, in the fields of counterterrorism and drug interdiction. Gaining acceptance into the worldwide law enforcement community and developing a solid source of contacts is essential to business success."

Canada Customs, Transport Canada and the Canadian Police have been constant sources of support for Barringer — including co-operation on the original product research — all of which have frequent contact with similar agencies in other countries.

"Additionally," says Martinak, "we maintain regular contact with the Canadian High Commission in London — and Canadian Trade Commissioners in other parts of the world — for possible new customers and business."

Opening an office in the U.K. in 1995 — Barringer also has one in Paris and plans one in Southeast Asia later this year — has been another good move, according to Martinak.

"It has been a very good investment for our company," he says, "and proven an excellent mechanism for expanding in the U.K. and elsewhere in Europe — the leader in airport security."

But such a move needs preparation, he warns.

"Choosing the right people, through a good network of contacts, is key to success," he advises, adding that "at our company, we don't sit at home but invest a great deal of marketing dollars on travelling, making routine contacts and holding face-to-face meetings."

"And we have a great ally in the Canadian Government which is very supportive of export initiatives," says Martinak whose company also participates at key international trade shows.

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