

Amana Tech Consulting Inc.

- Saskatoon, Saskatchewan ■ Nezar Freeny, President ■ Founded company at age 28 (spring 2001) ■ Employees: under 10 ■ Exporting since fall 2001 ■ Export sales: 90%
- Export market: Arabian Gulf

The United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) is not a market most young exporters would tackle first. But Amana Tech Consulting Inc. president Nezar Freeny is not your average exporter, young or not. In the competitive world of Web-based solutions, Freeny has carved out a definite niche for his company. He's also discovered that the Canadian and Saskatchewan governments are there to support his exporting ventures. Freeny, could, in fact, be a poster boy for government export programs and services. The half dozen or so he used in his first year of business alone paved the way for his first two, major, contracts in the Arabian Gulf. And he's only just begun.

Not surprisingly, Freeny always knew he would one day run his own business. He didn't know that he would do it in Saskatoon. But that's where he came to do a Bachelor of Computer Science, at the University of Saskatchewan, after living in London, New York, Washington and

traditionally served the Arabian Gulf region, Amana can supply the same service at a lower cost because "we're dealing in Canadian dollars."

The Strategy: Making Contacts

Amana's first export contract – with the multi-billion-dollar Al Ghurair Private Company in Dubai, U.A.E. – was the result of a precisely executed export strategy to build a reputation in a region where "it's who you know before what you know."

In fall 2001, Freeny attended GITEX, the largest IT trade show in the Arabian Gulf, not as an

Amana is ... a Web-based solutions company that provides a comprehensive range of Web solutions, in English and Arabic, to clients in North America and

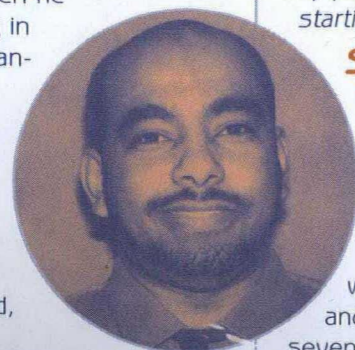
Toronto. Working for a few years to sharpen his computer skills in network administration and software development, Freeny soon recognized there was a gap in the

"As a small business, you should always try to find the government programs and services and use them."

the Arabian Gulf. Amana serves local start-up companies, Middle Eastern-owned businesses in North America, and companies in the Arabian Gulf for which it specializes in providing Web hosting and domain name registration.

From Sudan to Saskatchewan

Freeny developed his business acumen at an early age. He was just seven when he began helping in his father's manufacturing business in Sudan. By the time he was nine, Freeny was the shop supervisor and, in his father's absence, "the man in charge."



marketplace in Canada and abroad for a Web provider with both English and Arabic capabilities.

"I had the language and cultural skills, and I thought I was the right age to start my own business," says Freeny. "In your twenties you're more willing to take risks, you're not completely settled down. Those are the negative things said about young people, but they're actually positive attributes for starting a business."

Service Tailored for Overseas

How does a small IT company from Saskatchewan win, and keep, Arabic-speaking customers on the other side of the world? By offering sales and support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in their language. As for competition with the U.S. companies that have

exhibitor but as an observer, to see if the market was a good fit for his company and, more importantly, to make contacts. The Government of Qatar, with whom Amana eventually signed its second major contract, in July 2002, was one of the exhibitors Freeny approached at the show.

While he was in Dubai, a personal friend set up a private meeting with the president of Al Ghurair Private Company. After six months of negotiations, Amana had a contract to provide Web hosting services to the 40 businesses owned by the company. "That contract essentially established our reputation in the region, which helped us to get the Government of Qatar contract. The reference provided by Al Ghurair was also very important."

Persistence is also key to Freeny's success: "I kept calling the Government of Qatar. Something came out of almost nothing. You have to keep calling."

The Challenge: Building "Amana"

It's no mere whim that Freeny's company name, Amana, means "trust" in Arabic; building trust constitutes his biggest challenge as a young entrepreneur. "Most of the CEOs we deal with are twice my age, and most older people are not quick to trust someone much younger, especially when it comes to signing a large business contract."

Key to winning the Dubai contract was the fact that the Al Ghurair president trusted the "middleman," who in turn trusted Freeny. For other contracts, Freeny sends prospective clients a list of his accomplishments and credentials before he meets them. "It creates a certain perception ahead of time, so they're not as likely to ask for the man in charge when they first see me."

Plethora of Program Assistance

If the number of federal and provincial government programs and services that Amana has already used in its exporting ventures is any evidence, Freeny definitely knows governments are there to help. He first approached the International Trade Centre in Saskatoon, which connected him with the Canadian Consulate in Dubai. The Consulate provided him with helpful market information and, at Freeny's request, took part in the official signing after Amana landed the Dubai contract. "It's important in the



L to R: Tim Marshall, Fouad Soueid, Janea Bellay, Hatem Al Sibai, Christopher Thornby. Contract signing at the Canadian Consulate in Dubai, between Amana Tech Consulting Inc. and Al Ghurair Private Company, May 2002

U.A.E. to have your government involved. We're a small company from Saskatchewan, so no one really knows who we are. Having the Consul by our side gave us credibility. The Consulate also arranged for a lot of media attention while we were there. That has helped establish our presence in the region."

Freeny credits a good part of his company's success to its location in Saskatoon's Innovation Place, a research park developed by the Saskatchewan government. "We always have other people we can share ideas with, and the Internet infrastructure is superb. These kinds of things are very difficult to find if you're just renting an office somewhere on your own."

Amana also received market research reports from the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership (STEP), saving it time and effort in leg work.

Freeny hired his marketing director under Human Resources Development Canada's Youth

International Internship Program – and also used the program to send her overseas to sign the Dubai contract.

Patient Advice

Freeny's advice to young exporters can be summed up in one word: patience. "It's like going to a movie. If you're not patient enough to wait in line, you're not going to get in."

"Know ahead of time that when you approach a potential customer, they are going to say 'no.' Take those 'no's' and convert them into 'no's for now.' Then contact them again in two to three months when you have more experience under your belt. Keep calling."

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