

## Young Vancouver Craft Company Launches into Exports ... with a Bang

**W**ith hardly a year of business under its belt, *Made By Humans Arts and Crafts* is soaring from success to success in the U.S. market, following its participation in some well chosen trade shows south of the border.

Launching into the world of exports was no accident for the five-person company, which specializes in highly innovative and contemporary-looking giftwares — mainly flower vases — made from a variety of materials, including thermoplastic rubber, glass, wire, laminated paper, rock and foam.

### First few steps

"It all started at the February 1997 Vancouver Gift Show," recalls company president Carry Heijman. "A show organizer encouraged us to look at similar events south of the border, and to contact the International Trade Centre (ITC) in Vancouver and the Canadian consulates in the U.S."

From the ITC, Heijman got connected with the Canadian Consulate General in Minneapolis.

"Commercial Officer Dana Boyle advised us to participate in a small show that was slated for Portland, Oregon, in July," says Heijman. "There we not only met many prospective customers but also concluded our first sale."

"In addition," he says, "Boyle provided us with very useful agency contacts, advice on customs procedures, and information on other upcoming trade shows — as well as reminding us not to overdo it," he laughs.

But after the first taste of success, Heijman was eager for more. He added three more feathers to his cap — shows in Seattle, Chicago and San Francisco — in the same year.

As a matter of fact, the enterprising company just came back from another four U.S. shows (in Atlanta, Los Angeles, Seattle and San Francisco), all in the month of January.

### Export rationale

What motivated the young company — which already exports over 50 per cent of its products to the United States — to sell internationally?

"The Canadian market is not big enough," explains Heijman. "Besides, we're so close to the U.S. border, and with our relatively low dollar making our products more attractive to the American buyer, the urge to export was that more intense."

That doesn't mean though that it was all smooth sailing, according to Heijman: "There were many 16-hour days and much hard work before we became familiarized with the time-consuming export paperwork — such as U.S. customs and freight forwarding — which we did mostly on our own."

But the work has paid off. The company now has close to 600 cus-

tomers in the U.S. and is negotiating with Disney in Florida — in addition to having a few big customers in Austria, Germany, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

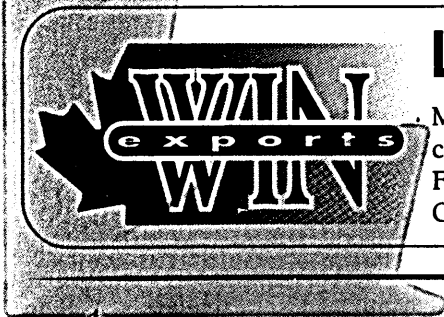
From this quick rise to fame — the company has had products featured in *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* — Heijman has learned a few lessons and has some advice.

"Get in touch with trade commissioners at your local ITC who can recommend appropriate trade shows. Double-check everything when preparing and shipping your products to those shows. Get a good customs broker and freight forwarder (test-ship a few products first). And be prepared for a lot of paperwork."

In fact, Heijman has been so busy that he hasn't even had time to take advantage of all the export assistance available through the ITCs — missions to border states, the Program for Export Market Development (PEMD), registering in the WIN Exports database (see box below).

"But rest assured that I will follow up on all these programs," says a tired but happy Heijman.

For more information, contact president Carry Heijman, tel./fax: (604) 733-8828.



## Looking for Export Opportunities?

Make sure you are registered in the WIN Exports database, which is used by trade commissioners abroad to promote your company's capabilities to foreign buyers. Fax your request for a registration form to 1-800-667-3802 or (613) 944-1078. Or call 1-800-551-4WIN (613-944-4WIN from the National Capital Region).