

SHARING TRADE SECRETS

Carmanah - from page 1

Carmanah's small, integrated solar marine lights on the Thames River and wondered if they could buy those small solar panels to power bus stop lights.

Carmanah had no transit lighting division and no sales force in the U.K., with the exception of a regional distributor for its marine products. Yet it was the first bidder to deliver a prototype and one of the few selected for field trials.

technology. But it had to endure a four-year selection process that CEO Art Aylesworth describes as "the most rigorous that Carmanah has ever experienced." Here's what the process taught the company about going after international markets.

Overcome the competitors' home-turf advantage: Carmanah came to the U.K. with a superior technology, but it was in a weak position as the outsider bidding against local companies. Carmanah used frequent visits and help from the Canadian High Commission to overcome the competitors' home-turf advantage.

Establish a presence on the ground: With the first shipment of bus stops to London, Carmanah also sent an engineer to manage the project. It later opened a London office with a four-person team and a wealth of experience. With plans to build a U.K. manufacturing facility, Carmanah will be poised to leverage its London success for growth in the wider European market.

Engage the services of the Canadian High Commission: Early in the process, Carmanah contacted Canadian trade officers at the Commercial/Economic Division of the Canadian High Commission in London. Canadian trade officers helped in many ways: providing contacts for U.K. media; meeting company staff on their visits to London; promoting Carmanah to raise the company's profile in the British market; providing market research; liaising with potential U.K. customers; and offering facilities for meetings and receptions.

Register with the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service: As a business client of the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service, Carmanah received market research, communications support, access to newsletters and customized on-line news through the Virtual Trade Commissioner.

Be patient: The contract process took four years to complete, including a series of field trials. In November 2003, Carmanah's bus stop was "highly commended" in the BP Innovation Award category at the U.K. Bus Industry Awards. At that time a contract announcement seemed imminent, but came nearly a year later.

Make the international investment pay off in other ways:

Carmanah turned every challenge into a strength and spun off its gains to other markets. By the time the London bus stop deal came through, Carmanah had established a new transit division. It had already launched its i-STOP™ and i-SHELTER™ products in North America. It had sold products to over 85 transit authorities. And it had a London base ready to tap the European market for all of its products, not just transit.

For more information, go to www.carmanah.com.

Four years later, Carmanah won the contract to provide solar lighting systems for 1,200 London bus stops. It is the first instalment in a five-year, \$16-million plan that would give London the largest network of solar bus stops in the world.

Lessons Learned

Carmanah knew it was in the running for a potentially huge London contract and a whole new vertical market for its

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CanadExport

Our in-house trade publication provides trade news, business opportunities, success stories and trade show information for your markets of interest.

The screenshot shows the Virtual Trade Commissioner website interface. At the top, there are logos for 'International Trade Canada' and 'Canada'. Below the logos are navigation links: 'Home', 'Contact Us', 'Help', 'Search', 'Canada Site', 'InfoExport', 'The Department', and 'Log Off'. The main content area is divided into several sections: 'MY MARKETS' with a grid of country buttons (Australia, USA - Midwest, USA - Northeast, USA - Southwest, Vietnam, Taiwan, China, India, Japan, South Africa); 'YOUR ACCOUNT' with a 'Log Out' button; 'CAN-Trade' with a 'Bookings' button; 'WHAT'S NEW' with a 'View All' button; 'SEARCH' with a 'GO!' button; 'ASK US!' with a 'Submit' button; 'MY PROFILE' with 'My Profile', 'My Links', and 'My Documents' buttons; 'EXPORT TOOLS' with 'EXPORTCheck' and 'EXPORTProtect' buttons; and 'Account' with a 'Log Out' button. The main content area displays 'Taiwan: Current Opportunities and Sector Information' with sub-sections for 'Business Leads', 'Missions and Events', 'Market Reports', 'Sectoral News', 'Taiwan: Country Information', and 'Trade Fair Listings'. Each section has a 'More' link. At the bottom, there are logos for 'EDC' and 'CCC'.

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