

With 31-year-old Nezar Freeny at the helm, Saskatoon-based Amanah Tech has penetrated one of the world's most challenging markets: the Arabian Gulf. In its early stages of development, this young export-based company, which was profiled in the September 2002 supplement, tapped into the vast array of supportive programs and services available to young entrepreneurs and exporters. Among these were the loan and mentoring programs of the CANADIAN YOUTH BUSINESS FOUNDATION (CYBF) (www.cybf.ca).

Offering loans of \$15,000 to cover start-up costs, the CYBF is Canada's only national organization dedicated to young entrepreneurs that provides business assistance not otherwise accessible to them. "We are specifically focused on the 18 to 34 age group, because there's a real gap in the market for them," explains CYBF's Director of Programs, Chris Ransom. "If their bank isn't willing to finance them, there are not a whole lot of other options. We can help anyone set up a business, including those who are going to be exporting."

Thousands of young entrepreneurs across the country have been assisted by the CYBF, which offers loan repayments of three to five years to ease the early stages of business growth. In conjunction with its financing program, the CYBF also offers mentoring, which has been proven to substantially improve the success rate of young companies. The CYBF's mentoring program, *Entre Nous*, matches loan clients with experienced professionals or business owners in the young entrepreneur's own community.

The CYBF set me up with a mentor very familiar with the culture of the Arabian Gulf. Her guidance was an enormous help to me in navigating that market.

NEZAR FREENY, PRESIDENT, AMANAH TECH

In Atlantic Canada, the CYBF's loan program is administered by the CENTRE FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT (CEED) (www.ceed.info). This not-for-profit innovation centre nurtures entrepreneurship by developing curriculum for schools, training those who teach entrepreneurship, developing projects to promote community entrepreneurship, and offering a variety of resource publications.

CEED is also the delivery agent in the Metro Halifax area for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA)'s SEED CAPITAL CONNEXION PROGRAM FOR YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS (www.seedconnexion.ca). The Seed ConneXion program offers repayable, unsecured personal loans of up to \$15,000 for young entrepreneurs aged 18 to 29 to launch, expand or update their business. Unlike other loan programs, the Seed ConneXion program also provides a \$2,000 grant for business training. Throughout rural Atlantic Canada, the Seed ConneXion program is delivered by COMMUNITY BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS (CBDCs — call 1-888-303-2232 for locations).

The CBDCs are part of a larger network of more than 260 community economic development corporations across Canada dedicated to meeting the financing and advisory needs of SMEs. These independent, autonomous organizations, known as COMMUNITY FUTURES DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS (CFDCs) in Central and Western Canada, are the place to turn if you cannot get commercial financing. They offer loans of up to \$125,000 (\$30,000 being the average) and can also help you put together a business plan — necessary for securing a loan from any source. CBDC/CFDCs also offer coaching, mentoring, business development, and training services. To find the office nearest you, visit www.communityfutures.ca.

Plus... Organizations such as the Business Development Bank, Jeune Chambre de Commerce de Montréal, and Canadian Council for Small Business and Entrepreneurship offer contests with financial awards for young entrepreneurs. You'll find out more about them in the other pages of this supplement.

Tapping into available resources...

Kodiak International Trade Corp.

International trade has always been Andrew Smith's passion. The Vancouver-based young entrepreneur founded KODIAK INTERNATIONAL TRADE CORP. (www.kodiaktrading.com) in 1998 when he was just 24. Kodiak buys products from Canadian food manufacturers and exports them to customers in Asia, Mexico and Iceland. While the world is his market, Smith has found customers outside Canada without a lot of expensive travel. Training and networking opportunities right in the Vancouver area have been key to his international success.

To hone his skills, Smith took courses offered by the Forum for International Trade Training (FITT — see p. 7). The young entrepreneur was subsequently asked to

be a guest lecturer for FITT, sharing his experiences as a new exporter. Through FITT, he met Derek Zeisman, trade commissioner with the International Trade Centre (ITC) in Vancouver. Zeisman introduced Smith to the trade development assistance and services provided to small and medium-sized enterprises by the cross-Canada network of ITCs.

Smith and Kodiak have never looked back.

"The ITC is a great resource for any exporting company," says Smith. "I've made international contacts through seminars they offer, and they've set up one-on-one buyer meetings for me with delegations visiting from other countries. That's how I got my Hong Kong customer."

The ITC also pointed Smith in the direction of other DFAIT services.



ANDREW SMITH

"I've used the trade commissioners in Shanghai, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Japan. They've responded within a day or two to my requests for information on prospective customers."

Smith's company is also registered with the Virtual Trade Commissioner and has benefited from financial assistance from the Program for Export Market Development (PEMD) to offset the cost of brochures distributed at trade shows or to international customers.

Smith credits one other resource for his export success: the mentoring he has received from his father.

The new generation of leaders...

Garrison Guitars

At age 30, Chris Griffiths is the youngest company executive to serve as Chair of the Department's SME Advisory Board (see p.1). But his age is immaterial. Griffiths brings to the position a dozen years of business experience and natural leadership ability.

Griffiths is president of GARRISON GUITARS (www.garrisonguitars.com) — one of Canada's largest acoustic guitar manufacturers and an astounding export success. (See the September 2002 *CanadExport* supplement.) The four-year-old company exports its revolutionary guitar line to 28 countries. Success has come quickly but not without challenge. In the face of the rising dollar, Griffiths has had to make some tough decisions, but downsizing the company and dropping its least expensive guitar have made his company more profitable than ever.

It's that kind of acumen that Griffiths brings to the role of SME Advisory Board Chair. A Board member since its creation in 2001, he took over as chair in November 2003. "I see my role as drawing information out of the members and reformulating it for the Minister in such a way that brings its relevance to all businesses to the surface," says Griffiths. "I love the challenge of making sure each member is contributing and then summarizing their input for the Minister."

Griffiths appreciates the diversity of the Board members' business experience. "Everyone brings a different perspective, which allows us to see the broad range of issues of importance to exporters." That



CHRIS GRIFFITHS

breadth of experience also benefits Griffiths — in his fellow Board members he's found a peer support network beyond the semi-annual meetings.

"I have a much greater understanding of and respect for the behind-the-scenes work that DFAIT does in helping exporters," adds Griffiths. "It's one thing to set up a board and listen to their advice; it's another to actually respond. But when we put forward a suggestion, we see results — it's very gratifying."

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**SME ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR, CHRIS GRIFFITHS,
PRESIDENT, GARRISON GUITARS**