

Vital Knowledge Software Inc.

Scores Big in U.S.

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Government resources there to help

"To begin with, we participated in an Export Awareness seminar organized by Industry Canada, which opened our eyes to opportunities in the U.S.," explains Vital President Michael Cormier. "New England was identified as our natural market because of its large population base and geographic proximity — just a day's drive away and close to major centres such as New York, Boston and Philadelphia."

Vital also took part in the Export Partnering Program and sought advice from Trade Team New Brunswick and the International Trade Centre (ITC) in Moncton. "By taking advantage of these government resources, we developed a solid market entry plan for New England," says Cormier.

"Then, basically, we went knocking on doors. Our first visit was to Boston where staff from the Canadian Consulate General assisted with qualifying our identified leads and suggesting the best approaches. We were actually totally unaware of the expertise and guidance available to Canadian companies around the world through the Trade Commissioner Service [TCS]."

With the help of the TCS, meetings were set up with potential distributors and staff from the Department of Education Technology Training in Connecticut and New Hampshire.

At the right place at the right time

As it happens, the New Hampshire Department of Education was active-

ly developing a professional development plan for its teachers. Vital's timing couldn't have been better.

"We presented the product and demonstrated our understanding of the common problems facing the educational community around the globe in making technology integration practical and beneficial to teachers. They expressed keen interest in



our unique CD/Internet solution and we left them with full documentation for further evaluation."

Within weeks, Vital was invited to bid on a request for proposal for technology training for New Hampshire's 14,000 plus teachers.

"We put a lot of effort into our response, creating a very significant document that clearly proved our capability of delivering a comprehensive package to meet their needs. Our product is excellent, but we knew that as a small company, from a small town, in a small province, we needed to get a lot of mileage from our proposal.

"After several weeks that seemed like years," Cormier admits, "we were notified that our bid was successful. When we found out we had won over the big guys, we were ecstatic. It's gratifying to know that our product was chosen solely on the basis of quality and value, not on the size of the company or marketing dollars."

Build on success

Securing the approval of a state department of education will undoubtedly be helpful in current negotiations with other states such as Massachusetts, Florida and Texas.

Is Vital looking out for new markets beyond the U.S.?

"Very soon," says Vital Vice-President Nola Chiasson, "although our plate is full for the time being. The next step is to continue to build credibility and a name for ourselves south of the border to facilitate introducing some of our other products and services.

"But technical training is in demand all over the world," she says, "and there is definitely an international market out there for us. When the time is right, we will pursue partnership opportunities with software developers or publishers in other countries. That seems to be the most cost-effective approach."

In the meantime, the company — which received the Best Educational Product prize at the 1998 New Brunswick Multimedia Awards ceremony, and carries the endorsement of the New Brunswick Teachers' Association — is in the process of doubling its team of writers and programmers to 10, as a result of its activities in the U.S.

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