

Small Ontario Company Sold on Team Canada Missions

As a three-time Team Canada participant, K. Bruce Friendship, President of Bayly Communications Inc. (BCI), knows that high-level trade missions are very beneficial, provided that companies do their homework.

For the Ajax company of 28 people that designs and manufactures digital access and transmission products, exports already account for 80 per cent of sales.

From signing to ordering

During last January's Team Canada mission to Latin America, BCI signed agreements in all four countries to promote the company's digital telecommunications products and provide technical support.

"Together, these agreements are worth close to \$5 million over the next two years," says Friendship. "Our deals wouldn't have been concluded so quickly if it were not for the high-profile trade mission," he adds.

And these deals are not just on paper, Friendship explains.

"We are starting to see some real rewards from Brazil, Chile and Argentina, with major orders coming in from all three countries," he says. "And even though Mexico is a little flat now, it's a matter of being patient."

Friendship is confident that the order he finalized last month from the Chilean army as well as the recent first order from Brazil will lead to many more prospects.

According to Friendship, who is also a member of an Ontario task force on small business exporting, Team Canada trade missions provide an excellent opportunity for businesspeople who are not experienced in foreign markets to test the waters.

Homework and follow up key to success

But Friendship is also convinced that participation alone is not sufficient to reap rewards.

"Things just don't happen overnight! You have to do all the preliminary work," he explains, "investigating the target market by talking to Canadian Trade Commissioners in the field, finding representatives and agents, lining up potential customers, corresponding by e-mail and even following up with a visit.

"And don't hesitate to seek help from federal and provincial governments," he adds. "They offer excellent services and information in addition to the Team Canada trade missions."

Friendship speaks from experience when he says that the networking process must start ahead of the mission — sometimes up to six months before.

"Start by networking in Canada. Talk to experienced exporters that do business in your target country. Their knowledge and experience can help you avoid common pitfalls or costly ventures. They can give you a feel for how business is done in that country and explain the cultural nuances that you must be aware of and that are very often critical.

"In our case," he says, "we signed contracts in the four Latin American countries visited, with agents we had lined up — in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Buenos

Aires and Santiago — prior to the Team Canada mission. Team Canada provided credibility with our customers."

Long-lasting benefits

That credibility helps build business over the years as shown by orders BCI is still receiving from the Philippines and Thailand following the Team Canada 1997 mission.

Even before participating in Team Canada missions, BCI made some business contacts in Singapore with a company heavily involved in the Russian market, which BCI is now exploring closely. And having participated in Team Canada is another feather in BCI's cap that vouches for the company's credibility.

"I would estimate that Team Canada trade missions, coupled with other international trade activities, have served as catalysts in generating new business that has created approximately 25 new jobs at BCI," Friendship says.

He is also the first to recognize that this all takes time and money.

"Exploring new markets involves costs," Friendship admits, "but the rewards far exceed the expenses. In fact, if it weren't for exports, our company wouldn't exist today."

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