

MOBILE DATA INTERNATIONAL

How Best to Sell a Complex Product in an Unknown Market

The Canadian operations

Founded in British-Columbia 10 years ago, this company manufactures, installs and services mobile data products to various markets (eg. courier, utilities, public safety, taxis). In July 1988, the company was bought by Motorola.

Its overseas activities

The involvement of MDI in the UK dates back to 3 years ago, when MDI management saw market potential in the UK and sent one of their sales managers, an Englishman who had moved to Canada, to set up a sales office, giving him overall responsibility. The use of an agent was dismissed because of the complexity of their products. Starting from a small office with only one secretary and telephone, the UK subsidiary now occupies a building near Heathrow Airport and employs 30 people.

Lessons to be drawn

Regarding MDI's expansion in the UK, the following points are worth noting:

- Taking into account the need for a local presence, they were able to probe the UK market without investing too much by starting very small and by using, at first, expatriates thus avoiding costly and lengthy training.

Dealing with a "global product", ie. one that offers the same benefits to any customer, and operating in a market where the potential clients are not numerous and easily identified, they were able to start without undertaking an extensive market study and without having to change their sales pitch.

- They won't hesitate to take a potential customer to North America and to show the production facilities and/or practical examples of their products in order to reassure him on the seriousness of the company.
- In order to facilitate the integration of their expatriates into the UK, they offered them a "survivor" manual highlighting any potential practical problems and explaining all the basic things one must know before moving "over the pond".