

Right Connections Help

Small Entrepreneur Takes Export Plunge

Today we introduce you to Ms. Paddy Ruby Ormiston, who is typical of many of our CANADEXPORT readers: a small business entrepreneur, eager to enter the global market, but unsure as to how to proceed. The account of her first foray into the U.S. marketplace and how she worked with our Canadian Consulate — through the NEBS (New Exporters to Border States) program might help some of you get started. Paddy's story was first told by Manfred Fast, and appeared this fall in the Port Colborne-Wainfleet Community Futures Newsletter, who graciously gave us permission to reprint.

Exporting can be a scary subject for a small business. Entering the global market involves dealing with new procedures, regulations and people. This seemingly complex process can be made relatively simple if you utilize the right organizations.

The Canadian Consulate (Buffalo) and the Wainfleet Economic Resource Centre (ERC) can assist you in expanding into the U.S. marketplace. Just ask Paddy Ruby Ormiston who has made the transition to the international stage with the help of these two organizations.

Paddy's first major exposure to the international marketplace occurred July 18, 1993 when she loaded up her handblown, glass art products and set up shop at the Rochester Giftware Trade Show. For four days, Paddy's work was exposed to the entire Northeastern U.S. manufacturing network, a market of 24 million people.

How did Paddy become a part of the trade show? "All it took was six or seven phone calls to the Canadian Consulate and my booth was all set up," said Ms. Ormiston.

Paddy contacted Marcia Grove of the Consulate for assistance. "The support was fabulous. They provided step-by-step assistance, supplying contact names, advice on brokers and market data (buying patterns, demographics, etc.), in order to make the transition to the U.S. market easier."

The Consulate purchased a block of booths at the trade show to enable new businesses to infiltrate a new market. As a first time exhibitor, Paddy paid only \$80, or 20 per cent of the actual display booth fee.

The trade show was a major learning experience. Almost 1,300 business representatives toured the display booths to examine and purchase merchandise. "Everyone basically just went about conducting business," said Paddy.

"The connections and contacts were fabulous. I talked with agents, reps, buyers, custom agents and government officials. The networking enabled us to discuss sales trends with similar businesses; the general state of the economy; distribution strategies; marketing plans; and most importantly, the best means for breaking into the international market."

The growth of Paddy's business, from a basic concept to an international marketer, was a progressive learning process which began when she moved to Port Colborne. Business consulting from the Economic Resource Centre and practical business training through the Community Business Network program enabled her to get her business up and running.

In the spring of 1993 Paddy attended an Export Workshop, held in Port Colborne, where speakers from the Canadian Consulate (Buffalo), U.S. Customs, and U.S. Immigration and Naturalization

Service provided information on "doing business in the U.S." It was here she learned of the vast trading opportunities available in the American marketplace and she began to enquire about trade shows being held in the U.S.

The trade show has opened up a number of potential business opportunities for Paddy. She is currently negotiating a possible joint venture with a London, Ontario-based giftware company to share distribution, marketing, sales and product lines. Other businesses at the trade show are also interested in "repping" her work.

Paddy is interested in doing another trade show in Pittsburgh in January 1994. "You have to go back, get your name established and show others your business is alive and doing well," she said.

When asked to compare Canadian and U.S. trade shows, Paddy says Canadians have a lot to learn. "Canadian shows focus on large, spacious displays with a small degree of sharing and cooperation among businesses. American shows are smaller, more intimate, with booths packed full of products. The atmosphere is competitive but the information sharing is excellent. Everyone helps everyone." There seems to be more flexibility in the way business is conducted in the U.S. "At the trade show everyone is dealing on neutral ground. There is always room to negotiate and deal. We need to adopt this philosophy in Canada." Paddy says the experience was well worth it. She recommends it to others.

To learn more about trade shows, exporting to the U.S., or the New Exporters to Border States program, phone the International Trade Centre in your province.