

Geomatics Company Maps Winning Strategy in India

PCI Geomatics Group has invested much time and money in the Indian market, where its growth culminated last year in the opening of the company's first full-fledged branch outside North America.

Based in Richmond Hill, Ontario, PCI is one of the world's top 10 suppliers of innovative software for remote sensing, digital photogrammetry, spatial analysis and digital cartography. Its exports account for 70 per cent of revenues, and it has installed systems in 115 countries.

How did the company tap into the Indian market?

The road to success

PCI initiated its presence in India 10 years ago through local representation. According to company associate Dr. Jiten Saha, there are several reasons why a local rep or partner is crucial to success in India.

"The market is large and diverse," he explains, "and the decision-making process complex and long, particularly in government projects."

PCI was originally looking at sales of hardware in India, but soon turned its interest to software — a move that coincided with India's venture into the launching of satellites. When the company won a government of India tender in 1993, it knew it was on the right track.

"It wasn't a huge contract," says Saha, "but it was big in terms of potential for product acceptability in other regions and localities."

The strategy paid off with the sale, the following year, of 42 software licences to the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) — a sale that provided the initial impetus to look at the establishment of a local office.

From local rep to local office

The decision for a direct local presence was facilitated by a marketing grant in 1994-95 from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's Program for Export Market Development (PEMD).

"The marketing results were quite encouraging," Saha recalls. "They helped increase sales and demonstrated that many clients wanted not only sales but also to use our after-sales services, pointing to the need for opening an office."

Calcutta was chosen because of its proximity to major universities that could supply skilled personnel, its air and surface transport links, and its banking facilities, as well as its other amenities and services.

"We also chose Calcutta to cover the emerging market there," explains Saha, "since we already have good coverage by our reseller in other regions of India. Potentially," he adds, "we're developing a regional sales office to expand into Bangladesh and Nepal."

PCI's Director of Sales for Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Isabell MacRae, is enthusiastic about the company's prospects since the office's opening in August 1996. "India now accounts for a significant fraction of our international sales, and with increased interest by the Indian government in improving the country's infrastructure, we see strong potential for growth."

Take it from a pro

Saha speaks highly of the assistance he receives from the Trade Commis-

sioners at the Canadian High Commission and Consulates in India, with whom he is in constant contact.

"They provide us with market intelligence and apprise us of new opportunities," says Saha, who recalls, as an example, the contacts the Trade Commissioners helped him make at the 1994 New Delhi International Conference on Remote Sensing.

"But they can only do so much," he warns, "the rest is up to you."

"To be successful in India," says Saha, "Canadian firms must be willing to show flexibility in adapting products to Indian requirements, and commit to a longer-term business relationship through sharing of expertise."

Adaptability and commitment have indeed been critical factors in the growth of PCI's sales in India.

"We are in the business of selling licensing to end-users," Saha explains, "but in India, the market is different. Indians need technology transfer and want to participate in the business. So stay for the long haul if you want to be accepted."

"And be patient, work at their pace," he advises, "because things move slowly there. But you have to be there to monitor the situation and jump on the opportunities when they arise."

As a matter of fact, Saha is looking for Canadian companies wanting to participate in joint ventures to set up a map production facility in India.

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