



Canadian Exporters: Profile

Robert Koerber • Rutherford Controls Ltd. • Cambridge, Ontario

Robert Koerber came to Mexico "on a flyer", as he says, to take a preliminary look at a new market for Rutherford Controls, Ltd., the Cambridge-based firm for which he is international sales consultant.

"I'm pretty green," he says. "I haven't seen any big orders yet. But there are lots of plans."

Koerber is new to his company, as he acknowledges, and new to the region. But his natural response to the Mexicans already had the personal touch respected in Mexican business. He noted that one of the Mexican business people he dealt with, who was very helpful to him, had expressed great interest in the fact that he had a year-old child. In writing to thank her for her assistance in Mexico, he instinctively enclosed a picture of his daughter. Green or not, he has an approach that is likely to be appreciated in Mexico.

Arriving in Mexico a couple of days before the show opened, Koerber took advantage of some free time to tour the Aztec Pyramids at Teotihuacan and to visit the Shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Initially he ignored the shuttle bus offered to exhibitors to walk to Exhibimex from one of the hotels, in order to get a better grasp of what the city was like (once he realized the distance involved, he decided upon the shuttle!). He considered that catching the flavour of the place could only add to his ability to do business here.

He had a busy Expo, and "I regard it as a success for us," he says. He came back from Canada Expo "full of ideas and enthusiasm," and with at least the prospect of a substantial sale of magnetic locks, one of the company's key products.

Rutherford Controls is a family business. Founded in 1923, the firm's head office in Cambridge and sister company in Virginia Beach, Va. are both run by granddaughters of the founder. In the beginning, the locks that are its main product line were simpler, but in the last decade or so it has seen the product evolve into sophisticated, electronic devices to secure properties.

"We specialize in designing quality electric locking products to the hardware, locksmith, access control and alarm markets. Our products are designed with the specific installers' and end users' requirements in mind. Most products are assembled in our two facilities to meet industrial requirements and provide immediate delivery."

His first foray into Central America was a recent mission to Panama, El Salvador and Guatemala, related to the security industry. Mexico was new terrain for Koerber and Rutherford. The previous trip led to "some work in progress," so, unlike many exporters, Rutherford has entered other parts of the region before coming to Mexico rather than identifying Mexico as its gateway to Latin America. But Canada Expo 94 seemed like a logical step.

"I didn't get all the contacts I wanted at the show," Koerber said. "But I

gave out a lot of literature and got some interest. In the three full days, I went out to ten meetings with clients around the city."

One of the potential clients asked for a quote on 100 of the aforementioned magnetic locks, and Koerber is now sending follow-up literature. "I have contacted them since, but haven't heard back yet," he said about a week after the trade fair ended. But, though new to Mexico, he has listened to others who are there, and to the briefings.

"Yes, we know how to be patient. Rutherford is in Mexico for the long run, and things will take time. I'll be going back down in late summer or early fall. I feel positive about it — I may take my wife and daughter this time so we can vacation there afterward — a working holiday."

In the meantime, fired by enthusiasm for the company's prospects, Koerber is preparing suggestions and drafting literature for "the next time" in Mexico. Looking to the future, he is also taking a Revenue Canada course on customs and excise rules in the NAFTA markets, plans to take a GEO-FITT seminar in May in Toronto, and has enrolled in a Spanish-language course.

The "flyer" on which he came to Mexico may earn him "frequent flyer" points in the company's newest potential market.

Access

Access, the newsletter of the new Access North America (ANA) program, is published monthly and only in *CanadExport*. Subscribers to *CanadExport* automatically receive *Access*. It examines opportunities for Canadian businesses, introduces some Canadians already operating in the Mexican and U.S. markets, profiles specific sectors, and notifies readers of forthcoming events related to doing business in Mexico.

Your feedback is welcome. Comments and correspondence should be sent to the Access Program, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, Ont., K1A 0G2, Canada, fax, (613) 992-5791.

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