



**Michelle Yates**

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**MAD Creations, Inc.**  
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Year Established: 2000

Employees: 5

Years Exporting: 3

Export Sales: 80%

Export Market: U.S.

*“The biggest rush for me is to talk to people and get that new account.”*

**Business Description:**

At the forefront of innovation and evolution in the food service industry, MAD Creations designs and distributes creative, powerful art solutions that are both functional and décor oriented. These include signs, menus, packaging, restaurant décor items and corporate identity packages. “I call us the Umbra for restaurants,” says owner Michelle Yates. “We create restaurant products, including menu systems and print holders — basically anything a restaurant can use.” Among the company’s blue chip client list — for which it does custom manufacturing — are Disney, Caesar’s Palace, Bellagio Resorts and HEINZ. MAD also offers a full catalogue of in-stock products.

**Background:**

Trained as an artist, Michelle found her talents in demand when she worked in the food service industry — often painting signs and murals for the hotels that employed her at the front desk. “I quickly began making more money at that than the front desk jobs and decided to start my own business.” Her gender has worked to her advantage. “Men often think women are better at décor...and we are, in fact, raising the bar for restaurant décor products.”

**Unique Feature:**

“Because the core of our business is design and I am food service knowledgeable, it is a big edge. My competitors are mainly sign people.”

**Honours:**

Women Business Owners of Manitoba (WBOM) 2003 Manitoba Women Entrepreneur of the Year Award winner for International Trade and Overall Excellence

**Why Started Exporting:**

“The U.S. food services market is 10 times the size of the Canadian market, so I began selling there immediately — even before the Canadian market.”

**Export Preparation:**

Michelle accessed financial assistance through Manitoba Trade & Mines to allow the company to participate in food service industry trade shows in the U.S. By plugging into the Trade Commissioner Service, she found valuable contacts in L.A. and Germany. She is also involved in the Women’s Enterprise Centre and Women Business Owners of Manitoba.

**Biggest Exporting Benefit:**

“Access to a larger market. Our sales have quadrupled since we started.”

**Best Exporting Moment:**

“When I got my first big account — which was Kraft. This gave the company credibility.”

**Greatest Challenge:**

“The biggest challenge is finding the cash to grow. The hardest and most important thing is managing the cash flow. As we get larger, we need the money to fund the manufacturing of bigger orders. Those big orders can put you under, in a strange sort of way, if you don’t manage your cash flow tightly.”

**Lesson Learned:**

“Since 9/11, we have been keenly aware of the need to use a sales approach with the U.S. that is non-threatening. We talk about the favourable exchange rate and that works well.”

**Exporting Advice:**

► *“Find a good customs broker to educate you about labelling. If it’s not done right, your customers will either not receive your products at all or will not get them in a timely fashion.”*

► *“Get insurance from EDC (Export Development Canada) for peace of mind.”*

► *“Participate in trade shows if you are selling a product and be sure to follow up on all leads. Because everything we do is visual, the best way to sell it is to let people see it and touch it.” Michelle also sourced distributors at the food service restaurant shows she attended.*

**Future Exporting Goals:**

Michelle is targeting the summer for the opening of a California office. She has chosen the golden state because it is a huge and “funky” market and one that tends to embrace new décor items first and set the trend. “Our next step is sales representation in Germany within two years.”

**Where to Go When You Want Help to Grow Globally**

As you start on your export path, be sure to tap into the organizations in your region for assistance and support.

**Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency Women in Business Initiative**

**WHAT IT IS:** The Women in Business Initiative (WBI), announced in October 2002 by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), is a \$17 million initiative designed to improve the growth and competitiveness of women-owned businesses and their greater representation in Atlantic Canada’s emerging growth sectors.

**OBJECTIVES:** To strengthen the management capabilities and business development skills of women entrepreneurs; to provide women with improved access to capital and business support services for business start-up and growth; and to increase the number of women business owners selling in international markets and in knowledge-based industries.

**EXPORTING SUPPORT:** The WBI includes six key elements, one of which is the Exposure to Exporting and Innovation Program. A primary objective of this Program is to focus on growth strategies for established women-owned businesses. These strategies are achieved by encouraging more women to consider exporting as a growth option, and to take the initial steps in planning and establishing sales to export markets.

The WBI assists women entrepreneurs to identify and take advantage of international market opportunities by: helping to ensure that more women entrepreneurs gain access to exporting programs and activities delivered by ACOA and other trade-related departments and organizations; targeting women-owned firms for participation in trade missions; and helping women entrepreneurs access trade training and exporting seminars, and pre-exporter orientation training.

**INFORMATION:**

ACOA New Brunswick:	1 800 561-4030
ACOA Newfoundland and Labrador:	1 800 668-1010
ACOA Nova Scotia:	1 800 565-1228
ACOA Prince Edward Island and Tourism:	1 800 871-2596
Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation:	1 800 705-3926

or visit  
[www.acoa-apeca.gc.ca/e/business/entrepreneurship/wbi/wbi.shtml](http://www.acoa-apeca.gc.ca/e/business/entrepreneurship/wbi/wbi.shtml)

**Western Economic Diversification Canada Women’s Enterprise Initiative**

**WHAT IT IS:** Funded by Western Economic Diversification Canada, the Women’s Enterprise Initiative (WEI) provides business information and services specifically tailored to the needs of women in Western provinces. Each province has established a WEI organization under this initiative. The non-profit groups offer access to a loan fund and advisory services, pathfinding to existing services plus a host of unique products and services. WEI offices are located in Kelowna, Calgary, Saskatoon and Winnipeg, with satellite offices in Vancouver, Edmonton and Regina.

**OBJECTIVES:** Western Economic Diversification Canada established the WEI in 1994 to promote entrepreneurship as a career option for women, and to identify and fill service and financing gaps facing women entrepreneurs. Delivered directly or indirectly,

services are designed to improve access to financing, education and training, business advice, loan care, information, networking and mentoring.

**EXPORTING SUPPORT:** Generally covers anything from coaching and providing referrals about training resources through to supporting trade-related organizations, like the Organization of Women in International Trade (OWIT), in order to help women expand their businesses globally.

**INFORMATION:**

Women’s Enterprise Society of B.C.  
B.C. Toll Free: 1 800 643-7014  
Web Site: [www.wes.bc.ca](http://www.wes.bc.ca)

Alberta Women’s Enterprise Initiative Association:  
Alberta Toll Free: 1 800 713-3558  
Web Site: [www.aweia.ab.ca](http://www.aweia.ab.ca)

Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan Inc.:  
Saskatchewan Toll Free: 1 800 879-6331  
Web Site: [www.womenentrepreneurs.sk.ca](http://www.womenentrepreneurs.sk.ca)

Women’s Enterprise Centre of Manitoba:  
Manitoba Toll Free: 1 800 203 2343  
Web Site: [www.wecm.ca](http://www.wecm.ca)

WD Toll-Free Number (accessible in Western Canada only) 1-888-338-WEST (9378)  
Web Site: [www.wd.gc.ca](http://www.wd.gc.ca)

**Women’s Enterprise Centres Coming Soon to Central Canada**

As a result of recommendations in the report of the Prime Minister’s Task Force on Women Entrepreneurs, two new Women’s Enterprise Centres are scheduled to open this year to serve the large markets in Toronto and Montreal. These centres will provide some export training, counselling and information along with other programs and services to help women entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses.

**INFORMATION:**

**TORONTO:**  
Candice Rice, International Trade Centre,  
Tel: (416) 973-5157;  
E-mail: [rice.candice@ic.gc.ca](mailto:rice.candice@ic.gc.ca)

**MONTREAL:**  
Sylvain Savage, Manager  
Canada Economic Development  
Tel: (514) 496-5473  
E-mail: [sylvain.savage@dec-ced.gc.ca](mailto:sylvain.savage@dec-ced.gc.ca)

Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC)  
Tel: (418) 658-1530  
E-mail: [sadc@ciril.qc.ca](mailto:sadc@ciril.qc.ca)

**Organization of Women in International Trade: OWIT-Toronto and OWIT-Alberta**

**WHAT IT IS:** The Canadian chapters of the Organization of Women in International Trade, a non-profit professional organization designed to promote women doing business in international trade, which has over 5,000 members worldwide.

**OBJECTIVES:** To enhance the status and interests of women in the field of international trade through the establishment of a global network of business contacts. OWIT’s goals are to promote international trade and commerce, establish and expand international business contacts, particularly among women, and help members develop global business skills and stay current on international issues.

**WHAT YOU GET:** Networking through local chapter meetings and an annual international conference; access to an international Web site

with global business contacts; education and training through topical meetings, workshops and seminars, and informative newsletters.

**COST:** \$125 annual membership fee (Toronto); \$75 (Alberta). Open to exporters and importers, service providers and government representatives involved in all facets of international trade.

**INFORMATION:**

**TORONTO:**  
GAIL MORRIS AT (416) 253-1500  
E-Mail: [gail.morris@sympatico.ca](mailto:gail.morris@sympatico.ca)  
[www.wito.ca](http://www.wito.ca)

**ALBERTA:**  
Leann Hackman-Carty at (403) 214-0224  
E-Mail: [leann@concreteglobal.com](mailto:leann@concreteglobal.com)  
[www.owit.org](http://www.owit.org)  
[www.owit.org/albertapages.html](http://www.owit.org/albertapages.html)

**Other Women’s Business Organizations:**

Women Entrepreneurs of Canada  
Tel: (416) 388-5586  
[www.wec.ca](http://www.wec.ca)

Canadian Association of Women Executives & Entrepreneurs  
Tel: (416) 756-0000  
[www.cawee.net](http://www.cawee.net)

Newfoundland & Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs  
Toll Free 1 877 754-0555  
[www.nlowe.org](http://www.nlowe.org)

Prince Edward Island Businesswomen’s Association  
Toll Free 1 866 892-6040  
[www.peibwa.org](http://www.peibwa.org)

Centre for Women in Business, Mount Saint Vincent University  
Tel: (902) 457-6449  
[www.msvu.ca/cwb](http://www.msvu.ca/cwb)

New Brunswick Association of Community Business Development Corporations: To access the Women in Business Initiative (WBI)’s Business Counselling and Community Outreach Program, contact the following number in your area:  
Grand Falls: (506) 473-9775  
Shediac: (506) 533-8711  
Bathurst: (506) 548-7793  
Fredericton: (506) 452-3918  
Saint John: (506) 636-3780  
[www.nbcdbc.ca/main.htm](http://www.nbcdbc.ca/main.htm)

Réseau des femmes d’affaires du Québec  
Toll-Free 1 800 332-2683  
[www.rfaq.ca](http://www.rfaq.ca)

Women Business Owners of Manitoba-Winnipeg Chapter  
Tel: (204) 775-7981  
[www.wbom.mb.ca](http://www.wbom.mb.ca)

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\*Additional business matching in Toronto April 5, 2004