

VOORTMAN COOKIES

Coming to Terms with Different Retail Practices

The Canadian operations

Voortman Cookies is a family business founded by 2 Dutch brothers in 1950. It started as a small bakery and expanded gradually, first in Canada, then in the USA.

The overseas activities

Their involvement in the UK dates back to August 1987 and took the shape of a sales office started by their marketing manager (Dutchman who lived 20 years in Canada). The use of an agent was not seriously considered since a specialised distributor system was required because:

- Cookies have a short shelf life.
- Competition is very strong.
- Freshness is vital to the consumer.

An agent would have been an expensive unnecessary link.

The UK operations started on a very small scale with the marketing manager working from his home-office, but following a steady flow of sales a permanent office was opened. There is now a staff of 10 people operating in the UK. Recently the UK sales office has begun to explore the French market.

Lessons to be drawn

The entry of Voortman Cookies to the UK was preceded neither by a thorough market study, nor by an extensive investigation of the possible sources of difficulty. Fortunately for the company, the perseverance of their salespeople resulted in a successful market entry, but not without some pitfalls:

- They lost much time as initially the wrong buyers were contacted, since their method of distribution is not commonly used for cookies in the UK.
- They had not foreseen some differences between UK and North America:
 - UK buyers tend to be concerned about possible delays in importing from outside of the EEC.
 - UK buyers take longer time to decide. "Even if they like the products, they want to see your face a few times, before they make the final decision."