

# Tilano Fresco cracks U.S. market

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The company got off to a quick start in Vancouver, but this was not the case as they started moving east. "We still haven't cracked the Toronto market to our satisfaction, so we started looking south into the United States," says Brodeur. "I think the biggest thing we learned was that the U.S. is not just an extension of the Canadian market. Just because we speak the same language doesn't mean we're the same. It's different in the U.S. and we knew we needed

some guidance," says Ilicic. When asked about the differences Brodeur adds, "In Canada, you are asked what your minimum is, and in the U.S. you are asked what your maximum is. The pressures of meeting demand in the U.S. make Canada a very different place to do business."



Tilano Fresco's decorative tiles on display

## Trade Commissioner Service at work

In the summer of 2002, the partners got wind of a government-sponsored program that helps Canadian companies enter and compete in the U.S. gift market. This particular program was put together by the Canadian Consulate in Atlanta, Georgia, which, coincidentally, is also home to the Americas Mart—the largest permanent gift showroom facility in the U.S. In September 2002, Sylvie Racine of the Canadian Consulate in Atlanta, organized a rep locator mission to assist Canadian companies in establishing relationships with qualified gift sales agencies. Not only did Sylvie bring in a variety of industry experts, she also arranged a tour of the Atlanta

gift industry. While attending this mission, Tilano Fresco was able to secure one of the top agencies in the country. "The Canadian Consulate in Atlanta had a huge impact on our ability to enter the U.S. market so quickly. The Trade Commissioner Service is definitely a resource that more Canadian companies need to explore. The Consulate's involvement gave our small company a level of legitimacy in dealing with the biggest and most important agencies in the U.S.—and it worked," says Brodeur.

## Advice for exporters

As with any new company, the next major challenge will be to manage growth. "We designed a very scalable organization, so we've set up manufacturing and distribution points across North America. We know we have to keep a close watch on our cash flow and we are managing our growth carefully," says Ilicic. For its financing, Tilano is working with the Business Development Bank of Canada, the Canadian Commercial Corporation, and an angel investor. "Secure your financing and make sure you've planned your expansion to match your financing," adds Brodeur. "Also make sure that you get the best reps on board—the strength of your sales reflects how good your reps are."

And sales are good for Tilano. Its product was just picked up by Nordstrom's—a large U.S. department store—and will be available in 28 of its stores along the U.S. east coast. With two new products scheduled for introduction later this year, Tilano Fresco appears to be on the right track.

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