

GARNETTE WEBER

Co-owner, Executive vice-president
Interactive Tracking Systems (Itracks)
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

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Web Site: www.itracks.com
Year Founded: 1996
Export Sales: 85%
Employees: 45
Years Exporting: 5
Export Markets: United States

Description

This award-winning company designs and distributes fully customizable, on-line market-research software and services, which enable clients to conduct qualitative and quantitative surveys and focus groups via the Internet and chat-based technologies. It recently introduced Satisfaction Compass, a real-time, on-line tool to measure customer, vendor and employee satisfaction.

Background

Garnette and husband Dan Weber founded Itracks, essentially with a product (their first on-line survey tool) and a Web site. Although they'd tried marketing in Western Canada, their own market-research indicated that the biggest opportunities were to be found in the United States. Their first big break came when a large, U.S. market-research company found their Web site and agreed to pilot their product. Today, about 80% of their business comes from the United States with some of the biggest names in market research, like A.C. Nielsen and Ipsos-Reid, and several Fortune 500 companies counted among Itracks' clients.

Key Competitive Advantage

Garnette attributes their success to date to the fact that they decided to focus on the data-collection aspect of market research, while other organizations opted to market a full-service resource, including survey design, data collection and analysis. Thus, those organizations are potential customers, instead of competitors. "We've positioned ourselves as the technical leader."

Solution

They tapped into help available from the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, and the DFAIT/Trade Commissioner Services' network of trade commissioners abroad to source clients and contacts in key markets like New York, Buffalo, Seattle and San Jose. Just recently, they signed a reselling agreement with a major client with offices worldwide, which should facilitate sales and service beyond North America.

Best Moment

"A few years back, we were contacted by one big, prospective client based in Rochester, New York, who wanted to book a demonstration. Naturally, we assumed they meant an on-line demonstration. Next thing we knew, they were calling back to find out the closest airport to Saskatoon! That's how interested they were!"

Export Tips

Perseverance is Critical. "No matter how much research and planning you do, you have to keep slogging . . . making contacts, selling and following up."

Invest in the Best Employees You Can Afford. "From day one, our people have been as responsible for our success as we are."

For more on this story, visit: www.infoexport.gc.ca/businesswomen/exportlibrary/successstories-e.asp



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JOANNE PENNER

President
Plastic Rotational Containers Ltd. (PRKL)
Crossfield, Alberta

Tel.: (403) 946-4808
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Year Founded: 1995
Employees: 8
Export Sales: 23%
Years Exporting: 4
Export Markets: United States and Bangladesh



"If you're going anywhere near the developing World, you need people who know it. For small businesses especially, the whole system there—banking, governments, NGO structures—is incredibly complex."

Description

PRKL is a manufacturer and distributor of custom-made plastic products for agricultural markets, such as ventilation systems for stock barns. It is also part of a Canadian joint venture that partners with the Bangladeshi non-governmental organization (NGO), Proshika, in managing a manufacturing facility that produces a residential water filter (invented by University of Alberta engineering professor Dr. David Manz). (See www.davnor.com) This is designed to purify arsenic-tainted water supplies in that country.

Background

Joanne—who worked for years in the oil industry—and her husband found their biggest market in the U.S. mid-west agricultural belt, by working through contacts in the close-knit Hutterite communities in Alberta. "It was mostly word-of-mouth, between their friends and families over the border."

Working with Dr. Manz in developing his pioneering water filter, they discovered that the real market for residential filters was in developing countries, where pure water and public-filtration infrastructures are in short supply. With the assistance of Fred Richards, President of a Canadian private venture company, they were eventually linked to Proshika, their local joint-venture partner, which provided start-up funding. This led to the building and starting up of a manufacturing plant in Bangladesh. Fred worked with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Canadian High Commission in Dhaka.

Since 1998, the PRKL staff have travelled to Bangladesh to train local staff and set up a plant to manufacture filters. They've also supplied production equipment and moulds, and hosted Bangladeshi training at their Crossfields plant, about 30 kilometres north of Calgary.

At the end of its first year, revenues from the Bangladeshi operation are about C\$80,000—just breaking even—and PRKL won't see income from that operation for some time: they've exchanged their time and expertise for shares in the joint-venture company.

Biggest Challenge

"It is finding that foothold abroad. Exporting to the United States is so easy in comparison! Finding the time and money for growth is another big challenge."

Solution

Finding the right partner. "We were lucky to find a great contact here, through the Bangladesh High Commission, who put us in contact with the right people there." Joanne (who is of Cree descent), also credits Industry Canada's Aboriginal Business Canada with being "a huge help" in providing funding for expansion and guidance. The joint-venture Canadian company is looking at going public this year in an initial public offering to fund expansion. "In our case, accessing capital hasn't been an issue, but being able to provide an attractive return in the right timeframe is. We need investors for the long-term who believe in our vision."

For more information, see full profile at: www.infoexport.gc.ca/businesswomen/exportlibrary/successstories-e.asp

Join Women in International Trade - Ontario (WITO)



The first Canadian chapter of a worldwide organization dedicated to increasing global trade opportunities for women in over 30 countries. For more information, contact: **Candice Rice**, Tel.: (416) 973-5157 or E-mail: rice.candice@ic.gc.ca
Web Site: www.wito.ca

Did you know?

According to a recent Statistics Canada survey, 33.9% of small- and medium-sized businesses are owned by women (50% or more ownership). Of these companies, 8.9% had sold or exported their products or services outside of Canada in 2000.