

Spirit Ware

Six Nations of the Grand, ON

www.spiritwarecanada.com

Spirit Ware's advice to new exporters is: *"Follow your instincts. Don't always listen to other people. If you have a unique product, you can still compete against import imitations. I have found a niche market in the US that has opened doors for me that do not exist in Canada. I wish I had started exporting sooner."*

What does Spirit Ware do? Spirit Ware is a designer and manufacturer of contemporary native fashions, gifts and home accessories. Most designs incorporate native motifs and traditional techniques, such as beadwork, embroidery and hand lacing. Spirit Ware also makes extensive use of deerskin and buckskin in its fashion and home accessories line. The fur, supported by the Fur Council of Canada, uses non-endangered species such as beaver and muskrat.

Spirit Ware has been featured in major newspapers and magazines, such as *Chatelaine* and *Flair* in Canada and in *Cowboy and Indian* magazine in the US. It has also been featured on local and national television.

What is Spirit Ware's experience in exporting? Spirit Ware's launch into the export market was delayed because DeMontigny, the founder and president, listened to other people's advice and to conventional wisdom, which said that her company should get its feet wet in the Canadian market before venturing further. In hindsight, DeMontigny feels that she could have entered the US market sooner because her product fits a US niche market that does not exist in Canada. Having faith in her product allowed her to pursue the research necessary to find her niche in the US market.

In the Canadian and US markets, Spirit Ware sells its giftware and home accessories through mail order catalogues and their fashion line through exclusive boutiques and galleries. Having participated in a NEBS (New Exporters to Border States) mission to the Denver Western Apparel Trade Show, Spirit Ware learned about the US market and has decided to exhibit at the next Denver show.

While participating in a NEXOS (New Exporters overseas) trade mission to Paris and Milan, Spirit Ware made contact with an Italian buyer who continues to be a customer. Other European clients buy through Spirit Ware's web site.