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Year Established: 1988
 (formerly as CORETEC)
Employees: 10
Years Exporting: 2
Export Sales: 50%
Export Markets: Middle East
 (UAE and Iran), Ireland, Japan

“Establishing partnerships and strategic alliances will gain you instant credibility.”

Business Description:

Started as an R&D/consulting engineering firm that has evolved into a platform technology development company, InCoreTec (formerly CORETEC) initially specialized in offshore and environmental engineering and ice management prediction models. One of the company's first projects was providing iceberg predictions for Hibernia. In 1994, it began developing a predictive artificial intelligence technology (patented as PAI) that has broad application potential, including providing new solutions to problems in marine navigation and in robotics. For example, its autopilot software for ships helps reduce fuel consumption, especially in narrow waterways.

Background:

A native of Egypt where she received her civil engineering degree, Mona came to Canada in 1975, was the first woman to complete a Master's Degree in Ocean Engineering at Memorial University (1980), and became a professional engineer in 1982. After holding a series of engineering positions at Lavalin-Fenco (NL) and at Memorial University's Centre for Cold Ocean Research Engineering (C-CORE) where she honed her expertise in iceberg forecasting, Mona started her own company. With her flamboyant hats and ever-present smile, she breaks just about every stereotype and barrier and gets right down to business. "People say female engineers have to work twice as hard. I did that right from day one." Today, she travels the world, meeting with shipping titans and trade ministers alike.

Honours:

2000 Newfoundland and Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs' (NLOWE) Entrepreneur of the Year Award for the Avalon Region; 2002, the first-ever Sara Kirke Award for Canada's Leading Woman

High Tech Entrepreneur from the Canadian Advanced Technology Alliance (CATA).

Why Started Exporting:

The potential market for InCoreTec's unique technology clearly goes beyond Canada, where applications are limited. So, Mona has always set her sights on the international market. She is in the midst of negotiating a joint venture with a Japanese manufacturer to license her robotics application. "Since Japan is the largest manufacturer in the robotics area — and this particular company has 60% of the world market — this deal would open a huge market for us. And the benefits will come back to Canada by allowing us to employ more people."

Export Preparation:

Mona established partnerships early on by utilizing Canadian Embassies to find the right connections and companies, to set up meetings, and to source reliable local agents to do follow-up. She attended key international conferences on shipping technology to become acquainted with her customers and competitors. ("Be patient, this takes time.") She also participated in focused, government trade missions for marine and information technology companies to the Middle East, U.S., England, Ireland, Germany and Norway, and continues to do so.

Lessons Learned:

"Each region you deal with — whether it be the Middle East or Japan — will have an entirely different culture, so it's important to be culturally aware. And there are still some countries where gender obstacles exist. For example, even though I was born a Muslim, I was not able to go on a trade mission three years ago to Riyadh where women were forbidden to attend the meetings in government offices. That was a big shock to me."

Greatest Challenge:

"The lack of financial resources, such as venture capital and angel funding, for small high-tech companies in our region is a big hurdle. You need to spend a lot of money to market and travel to meet face-to-face with clients. In our case, it is particularly expensive to take our engineers and equipment abroad to demonstrate our technology in a prospective client's lab."

Exporting Advice:

- ▶ **Establish partnerships and strategic alliances right from the beginning, which helps a great deal, particularly if your company is small.** "This can give you instant credibility with potential customers. Utilize the resources of the Canadian Embassies to identify the best partners."
- ▶ **Communicate regularly.** "Developing trust is important, so be sure to deliver on your promise with partners and to follow-up continuously. Open communications are crucial."
- ▶ **Protect your intellectual property.** "Be sure to get signed, non-disclosure agreements from any partners to protect your work."
- ▶ **Follow international quality standards.** "Getting ISO certification for your products is essential to gain credibility, respect, and trust from the end user."

Future Exporting Goals:

Seeing large potential in Asia, Mona is seeking to penetrate new markets in Singapore, China, and Hong Kong. She is already in negotiations with a large manufacturer in Singapore to take her marine products into that area.



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Year Established: 1987
Employees: 8
Years Exporting: 8
Export Sales: 90%
Export Markets: Belgium,
 Benin, Cameroon, France,
 Madagascar, Senegal,
 Switzerland

“Your business' rhythm of growth will lead naturally into exporting.”

Business Description:

Éditions L'artichaut inc. has built its commercial success around child-centred learning. The publishing house specializes in developing and producing textbooks and support manuals to easily learn and teach French. The 'méthode L'artichaut' enables students to draw on their individual strength to decipher the language code and monitor success on their own, making the teacher an assistant in the learning process. Originally developed for elementary schools, the program has since expanded to include both the pre-school and secondary levels. It is used widely in Quebec, but the firm's business is now mainly in exports to Europe and Africa.

Background:

A former elementary school teacher and research professor at the University of Québec at Rimouski, Ginette noticed in her teaching days that existing books and aids often missed their target because they did not make use of very simple techniques and tools that would help young children, especially those having a hard time learning to write properly. She and a colleague, since retired, developed this interactive teaching method that added fun and easy graphic and phonetic exercises to the process of learning to read and write.

Honours:

Prix de l'entreprise Import-export, Forum Africa (2003); Prix d'excellence du Réseau des Femmes d'affaires du Québec, Entrepreneure active à l'internationale (2003); Canada Export Cultural Achievement Awards (2003) from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Why Started Exporting:

Once the company's method and manuals became established in Québec's schools, there was little room to grow the business in Canada, especially in light of increasing

budgetary restraints. Ginette looked beyond the border to other francophone countries to introduce her firm's innovative "méthode L'artichaut."

Export Preparation:

To familiarize teachers with Éditions L'artichaut's approach and materials, Ginette used a variety of channels. However, a 1990 article in a journal published by Québec's Ministry of Education and distributed in francophone countries around the globe truly set the stage. Invitations to professional conferences and workshops followed, where Ginette presented L'artichaut's pragmatic approach. At one of these seminars, organized by the National Book Editors Association of Canada, she recruited a French agent interested in L'artichaut's products and three months later established a business relationship with the prestigious French publisher Les Éditions Hatier. A listing in Hatier's catalogue opened the European market.

Results:

Presence at international trade fairs, symposia and conferences followed, including one in Dakar, Senegal, in 1999 where Ginette presented L'artichaut's materials already adapted to suit the Senegalese environment. In 2002, she was invited to participate in a 'Team Canada' trade mission to Senegal and signed a contract worth \$600,000 with Senegal's Ministry of Education. Through Senegal, markets in Benin and Cameroon opened up.

Biggest Exporting Benefit:

Exporting French language books from Canada to France, when it used to be the other way around, is definitely a significant achievement. But Ginette's proudest moment came last November, when she received the Canadian Export Award of Excellence in the Culture category from

the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. She was the only woman finalist.

Greatest Challenge:

Being based in Rimouski, the time required for travelling is certainly a challenge, "Going from Rimouski to Montréal, you might as well go from Montréal to Paris." The same goes for transportation and delivery of the manuals, exacerbated by intricate customs formalities that change from country to country. Staying in touch with the firm's international partners and representatives has high priority, even though an interactive part of the company's Web site, 'Forum', helps address product-related questions.

Lessons Learned:

"Be prepared to guarantee any loan you need with twice the loan amount in assets. Convince your banker that you want to work for the long term and don't want to make money right away. Explain your business carefully to him or her to make yourself a financial ally."

Exporting Advice:

- ▶ "Do not expect to do business in a foreign country until you are certain you have a product that's unique and desirable in that market."
- ▶ "Believe in yourself and surround yourself with bright people talented in areas you are not."
- ▶ "Trust your business's rhythm of growth, which will lead naturally into exporting."

Future Exporting Goals:

Africa holds great exporting potential for Éditions L'artichaut, with Madagascar as a close target. Presence at the Cairo Book Fair this year might open additional doors.