

Garrison Guitars

- St. John's, Newfoundland ■ Chris Griffiths, President
- Founded company at age 26 (2000) ■ Employees: 63
- Exporting since fall 2001 ■ Export sales: 94%
- Export markets: United States, United Kingdom, Europe, Asia, Australia, New Zealand

Newfoundland and Labrador New Exporter of the Year 2002, Entrepreneur of the Year 2002, Outstanding Incubator Graduate ... the awards keep coming for Garrison Guitars. And deservedly so. Company founder Chris Griffiths not only invented a revolutionary acoustic guitar technology, he also recognized from the very beginning that the domestic market would not be big enough to justify the scale of his operations. Garrison, in fact, was conceived to go global. And gone global it has: Garrison's first year's production has been entirely pre-sold for distribution throughout Europe, Asia, North America and Australia.

The Company before the Company

Launching a successful company at age 26 is a remarkable feat, no question, but Garrison Guitars isn't even Griffiths' first company. He opened Griffiths Guitar Works – now the largest custom guitar store in Atlantic Canada – in

1993, when he was just 18. "Absolutely, I cut my teeth on Griffiths Guitar Works," says Griffiths, who first sketched the idea for GABST™ on an airline napkin six years before opening

matched me with a mentor who was manufacturing and exporting all over the world and had great experience to share with me."

Investment Challenge

One of Griffiths' biggest challenges has been raising the money to make his idea a reality. The Genesis Centre introduced him to an investment capital company, but it was up to Griffiths to develop the relationships (including with private investors he found on his own) that would bring in the investment he needed. "The investors appreciated the technology I was developing but wanted more development in my business

Garrison Guitars is ... one of Canada's largest acoustic guitar manufacturers, with a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility located in St.

"We were born with the understanding that we were going to be global."

John's. The company's patented Griffiths Active Bracing System™ (GABST™) has revolutionized the way acoustic guitars are made, replacing the more than 30 individually machined and installed wood pieces found in traditional bracing systems with one seamless glass fibre component. The technology adds more structural integrity to the instrument and increases acoustic response – not to mention reducing manufacturing time from several hours to 45 seconds. Rob Baker (The Tragically Hip), Maureen Ennis (The Ennis Sisters), and Ed Robertson (Bare Naked Ladies) are just some of the Canadian artists who play Garrison Guitars.

the doors of his manufacturing facility in September 2001.

Incubation at Genesis Centre

What do you do when you've got a multi-million-dollar idea but no technical know-how to follow through? You find a business incubation centre. Griffiths entered the Genesis Centre (a public-private-sector incubator for high-tech start-up companies in St. John's) in 1997, where he gained access to the marketing, financing and management expertise of world-class mentors and consultants, as well as to Memorial University's Manufacturing Technology Centre.

"Our three years in the Genesis Centre were extremely valuable," says Griffiths. "We relied heavily on the university to help us with research. And the Centre

plan with respect to how the market was going to react. They sent us off to do more market research. In the end I wrote three business plans as we got new information."

Now he has a challenge not many companies face in their first year: "managing strong growth."

The Strategy: Trade Shows and Contacts

Attending trade shows is key to Garrison's export strategy. The company unveiled its prototype guitars and GABST™ at the Winter National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) 2000 in Los Angeles – to incredible response. But its marketing began even before the show. Using the database of 2,700 registered distributors supplied by NAMM, Garrison contacted

each company, describing its product and expressing its interest in establishing distributors worldwide.

It was from Winter NAMM 2000 that the company met its first distributors, for Australia and the United Kingdom, and the number has increased from there.

Don't be Afraid to Pick up the Phone

"Find out what the market needs. Long before the factory was built, I was calling up potential customers and saying 'I don't have a product yet, but what are the gaps that need to be filled in your country?' Ninety-nine per cent of the time, you'll find people are very supportive and willing to invest their time in talking to you."



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Ecowise

- St. John's, Newfoundland
- Nycki Temple, Owner and Operator

What do you do if you're a retailer offering eco-friendly products made from hemp but you're having trouble finding products – and incidentally your sister is looking for employment? If you're Nycki Temple, owner of the retail store Hempware in St. John's, Newfoundland, you hire your sister, Paula March, to produce the products you need. Then, with March as partner, you set up a full-fledged manufacturing company and begin advertising to retailers across North America.

Established in 1999 when Temple was 24, Ecowise manufactures products such as re-useable coffee filters, guitar straps and pet accessories, all made from hemp and other fibres that constitute sustainable resources. Cutting her teeth on her retail operation, which she started at age 21, Temple is not shy to admit she's learned through her mistakes. She currently exports 15% of her hemp products to the United States, mostly to smaller retailers responding to her magazine advertisements and Web site. She's now doing more focused market research so she can actively target potential U.S. customers.

Temple knows that potential customers need to see her products. That's not easy for a Newfoundland entrepreneur. "You can't do just a little road trip from the island; every trip is a huge road trip." Temple has learned to make the most out of a trip by exhibiting at trade shows and by contacting customers ahead of time to let them know that she'll be there and entice them to attend.

One customer Temple knows she can count on to buy her hemp guitar straps is fellow St. John's company Garrison Guitars (see p. 8).

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SME Advisory Board

The Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) Advisory Board provides SMEs with the opportunity to give feedback on DFAIT's existing programs and services and serves as a forum for testing new ones. Meeting twice a year and reporting directly to International Trade Minister Pierre Pettigrew, the 17-member board is made up of senior executives of companies representing a range of industry sectors across the country. Two of the young exporters featured in this supplement, Garrison Guitars president Chris Griffiths and ZeddComm Inc. president and CEO Emad Rizkalla, serve as members of the Advisory Board. The Board held its inaugural meeting in June 2002. It will hold its next meeting in Vancouver in October 2002.