

Export Anyone?

By David LaChina

Did you know that 95 percent of the world's consumers live outside of the United States? You might be thinking that only large companies can successfully sell products to foreign markets or access consumers outside of the US. Yet more than 95 percent of companies exporting today are small to medium size enterprises. Data from the Small Business Administration indicates that 70 percent of companies exporting have 20 or fewer employees. As interesting as that may seem, it is estimated that 85 percent of California's manufacturers do not export. But, the reality is that many companies that are not exporting do make exportable products. Are you one of those companies?

Exporting has helped many companies increase their sales and profits. In addition, exporting reduces dependency on the U.S. market by providing market diversification. Consider this, while the U.S. economic growth currently runs at less than three percent per year, annual growth in emerging economies such as China, India, Brazil and Turkey is running at seven percent or higher. One way to participate in the growth in those markets is to export.

Advantages for U.S. companies selling in foreign markets include the reputation of "Made in U.S.A." A relatively weak dollar has also helped to make U.S. products cheaper overseas. Quality and cost are key components to being competitive in any market. Finally companies located in northern Los Angeles County have a unique advantage given their proximity to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach — the busiest cargo complex in the United States. The low cost of getting goods to those ports give local businesses a competitive advantage over businesses located in other parts of the central or western United States.

At this point you might be feeling that while you'd love to be able to sell your products outside the U.S., exporting is just too complicated, too risky, or too expensive for you. You might feel like you can't compete or don't have access to the right customers for your product

Access to experts who can help answer these questions just got easier as College of the Canyons has been awarded a Center for International Trade Development (CITD). On January 3rd our application was approved bringing the resources and infrastructure of this state program to the Santa Clarita Valley. Working in conjunction with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) hosted by College of the Canyons our array of no and low-cost technical assistance services to local businesses will be expanded into the area of international trade. We offer resources to help you assess your export readiness, understand what you need to know and consider before pursuing an international sales strategy, and, when you are ready, develop and implement your export strategy.

CITDs were established to promote California's international trade and competitiveness, assist exporters and importers, and advance economic and job growth. As a CITD our goal will be to assist small and medium size companies progress logically and successfully through the stages of export development which generally include:

- Building export capacity
- Researching and identifying export markets
- Identifying and securing partners to facilitate the transaction
- Making sales
- Delivering goods
- Getting paid!

If you have thought about the opportunities in exporting, or want to learn more, College of the Canyons is hosting Trade Connect, at 2p.m. Thursday, Jan. 26, at the Dr. Dianne G. Van Hook

University Center located on the College of the Canyons Valencia campus. This SBDC / CITD sponsored free event will bring experts in from a variety of disciplines to help introduce the local business community to the world of exporting.

The program will include experts who will discuss:

- Finding & expanding markets overseas
- Financing & Insuring overseas sales
- Export documentation & logistics
- Export readiness education & consulting
- Accessing key local export infrastructure including the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach

For more information about this event or to sign-up to attend, please visit www.cocsbdc.org

We look forward to seeing a number of local businesses make 2012 the year they first began selling their products overseas!

David LaChina is an International Business Advisor with the Small Business Development Center at College of the Canyons. He has more than 15 years of international trade expertise and has worked with firms in S.E. Asia and Europe and has lived in Micronesia, Italy and Thailand. For more information about the SBDC at College of the Canyons please call (661) 362-5900, email sbdc@canyons.edu or visit www.cocsbdc.org