

Exporting characters

Why, you may wonder, do the French only send six greetings cards per person per year whilst the British send 45? You could say that greetings cards companies have not looked back since the American influence infiltrated our shores, resulting in the Brits embracing such events as Mother's Day with a vengeance.

There is one British greetings card company, however, that sees its greatest potential in overseas markets and has set a target to increase international business by more than 40% in two years. And the company is well on its way to meeting that objective.

Andover based Gemma International specialises in children's 'character' greeting cards. They are licensees of many of the world's best known characters on behalf of some of the biggest intellectual property owners in the world, including Disney, Mattel and Hasbro. The characters featured on greetings cards they design and produce include Winnie the Pooh, Postman Pat, Thomas the Tank Engine, Harry Potter, Action Man and Barbie.

Mark Wicks, Export Sales Manager, told Export Focus how information is key when it comes to developing their overseas business. "As with any intellectual property, a thorough understanding of the licensing requirements in each market is fundamental." "The company is pleased to have this expertise in-house through our own Licensing Director, Tim Rudd-Clarke". "We need to be aware of the barriers to entry for every market we focus on and to have a knowledge of which organisations hold existing licences". "Where we obtain licences, we needed to know what restrictions there are on us distributing cards and the limitations regarding translated material and royalties", added Wicks.

Increasingly Gemma International is seeking tie ups with existing licensees in other countries as a way to increase international trade. As a result of the comprehensive service they provide - from initial design, through printing and production to distribution - they are able to offer all or part of these services to other companies. As Mark Wicks put it: "Often it is not viable for a licensee to design, produce and market a product for just one country and it is better for them to buy some or all of our services".

Another important issue for Gemma International is market intelligence. Not every character is well known, or for that matter, well received in every country. To gather market intelligence Gemma International uses the services of Trade Partners UK through their 'your passport to export success' scheme.

The company is able to take advantage of Trade Partners UK's invaluable market research services. "The licensed greeting card market is a complicated one and there are huge variations across the world, so information on specific countries and popular children's characters is essential for us to plan where we should look to export," said Wicks. "We even need basic information such as what shape, size and weight is required to ensure that the product is within the standard postage charge in each country".

Gemma International also took advantage of the support available from Trade Partners UK to exhibit at the 'Paper World' overseas trade show in Frankfurt earlier this year. During the course of the show, they secured five new customers.

The company is now almost certainly the largest character greetings card company in Europe. It remains a family business, with its roots going back to the 1980s when it became the licensee for My Little Pony.

Now operating as a supplier to major distributors in Europe and Scandinavia, Gemma International's total turnover has reached £10 million. Mark Wicks added: "Proactively researching and branching out into the European market has certainly enabled us to catapult our business into a different league".

Gemma International has for the last 15 years operated predominantly in the UK. However, in 2002 the company decided to explore its exporting opportunities and Mark Wicks contacted Trade Partners UK through the local Business Link. The company has worked with Tim Handcock, their appointed International Trade Adviser, ever since.

With the enthusiastic way consumers are latching on to new characters such as Harry Potter, and the endearing popularity of many of the world's better known characters, Gemma International is confident that its global ambitions will be achieved.



New healthcare and biotechnology sector adviser



Mitzi Swanson is the newly appointed International Trade Sector Adviser for the healthcare and biotechnology industries, based at Business Link Surrey. Mitzi is available to offer export advice to all South East companies looking to improve or even begin export operations.

With extensive experience in the healthcare sector, Mitzi is one of the six new

International Trade Sector Advisers appointed by Trade Partners UK in the South East to work with local businesses, predominantly SMEs.

Working with local Business Links across the South East, Mitzi will be encouraging companies to maximise their export potential via initiatives such as the 'your passport to export success' programme. She is convinced there is a great deal of global potential for new and existing exporters within the healthcare and biotechnology sectors.

At present she is identifying issues that affect this specialist sector and ascertaining what additional exporting assistance and information can be provided to companies.

Helping organisations with their export operations is not a new challenge for Mitzi. She previously worked in

China, assisting companies in the Asian market expand their business and develop their trade, while her most recent job was with NOP Healthcare, managing their Asia division.

Mitzi's educational history includes studying medicine at Manchester University with a final specialisation in medical biochemistry. Her knowledge and skills obtained through education and experience in the healthcare and biotechnology industries, both in the UK and in the Asian markets, make her an exciting prospect for all involved in this sector.

Mitzi Swanson said: "The South East is the main area in the UK for the medical, pharmaceutical and biotechnology sectors, with more firms than any other region, which means I have my work cut out for me". "My initial job will be to map out exactly where all the healthcare and biotech companies are based and how they interact. I have met many of the trade organisations and I am already working with a number of companies to help them with their exporting business".

A number of events are being organised for healthcare and biotechnology firms to help develop international trade. You can contact Mitzi Swanson on (mobile): 07717 458300, telephone: 01483 713300 or email: mitzi.swanson@businesslinksurrey.co.uk

Other advisers covering the Marine, ICT, Creative, Automobile - Aerospace and Environmental sectors have also been engaged.

Company gets framed in the USA

Acanthus, a specialist antique tapestry framing business, based near Chipping Norton, was awarded a "highly commended" for their stand when they exhibited at the 'Chelsea Flower Show' of the US, the Philadelphia Flower Show held earlier this year. During the nine-day show they achieved 222 sales, representing 20% of their annual turnover.

As part of the 'your passport to export success' scheme, David Brooks, Senior International Trade Advisor with the local Trade Partners UK team covering Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, provided advice and financial support to help Acanthus to attend the Philadelphia Flower Show.

As a result of the sales success achieved in Philadelphia, Acanthus plan to refocus their business on the lucrative US market. They have been invited to

return to Philadelphia next year and plan to attend other exhibitions on the East Coast to make the trip more cost effective.

Amanda Burrup, Proprietor, said: "The USA represents a fresh and exciting new market and an opportunity to transfer some of our business from the UK to the USA".



New technology team at Trade Partners UK



David I Lee, Mexico Market Adviser, Trade & Business Services, Canning House (left) with Ray Nottage, Chairman of Computair Ltd.

Trade Partners has introduced a specialist unit to assist existing and potential exporting companies in the IT sector. Called Software and Computer Team, the new unit hosted a launch seminar where they provided the opportunity for business people to gain an insight into the assistance and funding available to help UK technology companies gain export success. Pictured below (L to R) speakers comprised of John Davies, ICT Technology Adviser (Trade Partners UK), Tim Torlot, Director Technology & Sector Partnership (Trade Partners UK), Dale E Smith, ICT Sector Specialist from the British Consulate General in San Francisco and Mike O'Malley, International Trade Adviser (Trade Partners UK).

For information contact Carl Jayasekera on 020 7215 8117

Promoting UK cultural heritage and tourism expertise

Trade Partners UK is compiling a brochure and website to illustrate the best of British expertise in cultural heritage and tourism.

The package will include: strategic tourism planning, resort design & build, resort management, tourism architecture, museums, built heritage preservation, restoration, archaeology, libraries & archives, visitor attractions design & management.

Any organisation with an appropriate case study is invited to submit their entry and supporting photographs illustrating their expertise. There are no charges for submission and inclusion.

To register a case study simply complete the on-line questionnaire at www.tradepartners.gov.uk and send your completed questionnaire and supporting photographs to Trade Partners UK, Leisure and Tourism Team, Bay 448, Kingsgate House, 66-74 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6SW by 31 August 2003.

If you have any queries please contact: Jane Weeks, Museums & Heritage Export Adviser. Tel: 020 7389 3104.

E-mail: jane.weeks@britishcouncil.org
Jamie Cribb, Tourism Project Manager. Tel: 020 7215 4634.

E-mail: jamie.cribb@tradepartners.gov.uk



Women in business CD

Trade Partners UK, in association with Le Meridien Hotels, has commissioned an audio CD designed to help British businesswomen tackle the business challenges and opportunities offered by the Gulf markets. It was launched at the "Women in Business in the Arab World" conference held at the DTI Conference Centre.

Presented by Jan Francis and featuring interviews with ten women who have been there, done that and got the abaya. "New Moon Rising" sets out to debunk the myths and misconceptions surrounding the business environment for women in the Gulf and shows that this is a market place where women can, and do succeed.

The CD is available from Trade Partners UK free of charge and anyone (men and women) wishing to be sent a copy should fax Diana Hammond on: 020 7215 4831, or email her at diana.hammond@tradepartners.gov.uk

For further information please contact info@forwomeninbusiness.com or telephone 020 8943 3630.

Events for the South East region

2-9 August 2003

Cowes Week - Isle of Wight

Contact: Chris Burchell

12 September 2003

Doing Business in the USA Training Event - Business Exchange, Reading

Contact: Chris Burchell

W/C 15 September 2003

Germany / USA Healthcare Event

Contact: Ray Lowe/Philip Worley

23 September 2003

SEITAF - Horsley Towers

Contact: Louise Williams

23 September 2003

Dinner for Sir Stephen Brown and Business Link Chief Executives

Contact: Louise Williams / Vicky Thompson

23-27 September 2003

Aerospace Meet the Buyers - Arora Hotel, Gatwick

Contact Ray Lowe / Philip Worley

30 September 2003

Export Essentials - Arora Hotel, Gatwick

Contact: Chris Burchell

23 October 2003

South East International Trade Forum

Contact: Philip Worley / Rosemarie Vazquelero

27 October 2003

Security Meet the Buyers - Arora Hotel, Gatwick

Contact: Ray Lowe / Louise Williams

28-29 October 2003

Bio Partnering event with SEEDA & Southern Bioscience

Contact: Ray Lowe / Philip Worley

6 November 2003

Transconnect

Contact: Ray Lowe / Philip Worley

11 November 2003

International Business Awards - London

Contact: Louise Williams

19-21 November 2003

Medica Healthcare Exhibition - Dusseldorf

Contact: Ray Lowe / Philip Worley

27 November 2003

Annual Export Luncheon - Copthorne Hotel, Gatwick

Contact: Louise Williams

10 December 2003

SEITAF - Horsley Towers

Contact: Louise Williams

January 2004

Marine Meet the International Buyers - London Boat Show

Contact: Ray Lowe / Philip Worley

10 March 2004

SEITAF - Horsley Towers

Contact: Louise Williams

March 2004

Wessex International Week

Contact: Chris Burchell

July 2004

Farnborough Airshow

Contact: Chris Innes / Ray Lowe

Contacts

Philip Worley,

Trade Partners UK, London Square,
Cross Lanes, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 1UL

Tel: 01483 500764

Fax: 01483 484295

E-mail: philipworley@seeda.co.uk



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