

# Assessment program to ease office furniture suppliers' global anxiety

GRAND RAPIDS — As the major office furniture makers tell suppliers to take on a more global attitude toward business, the Van Andel Global Trade Center at Grand Valley State University is stepping in to give valuable assistance.

VAGTC has teamed with the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association International to present industry suppliers with a Global Assessment Program, a guided self-assessment tool for companies that want to evaluate the current and future issues facing them as they relate to global business.

VAGTC Executive Director Jeff Meyer told *MiBiz* his organization met with BIFMA officials to collaborate on ways to change and improve the industry. The mutually sponsored Global Office Furniture Symposium held this month created awareness of the global landscape. GAP is designed to address the issues that came out of that event.

"It's a service that looks at competencies, so that some of the uncertainty (over entry into the international marketplace) can be addressed," said Meyer. "The Global Assessment Program represents a low-cost, high-quality assessment program for these suppliers to take a look at what their global options are — the risk factors, the opportunities."

Meyer stated that the program is designed to help suppliers make a "nice, comfortable, easy transition" into doing business globally.

"We just want to produce a non-threatening atmosphere. We're not worried about changing their world. We just want to get them started down the road," Meyer said.

As part of GAP, OFM suppliers will fill out a customized questionnaire based on information gathered during a fact-finding interview with representatives from BIFMA and VAGTC. The extensive ques-

tionnaire is designed to probe into the uniqueness of an individual company and its global business profile. Completed questionnaires will be analyzed by VAGTC and a list of recommendations and action items will be prepared to guide the firm to potential opportunities and to outline areas of risk.

The GAP assessment will evaluate a number of factors such as:

- Market entry strategy.
- International team development.
- Supply chain efficiencies.
- International trade compliance.
- Foreign operations management.
- Global corporate structure.

Meyer points out that the list of assessment areas is widely varied so that VAGTC and BIFMA can assist firms effectively in the areas in which they choose to be helped.

"We want to service companies in a way that they see fit. If we made the program very nebulous, we wouldn't be offering a value. If a company can point to some specific area with which they need help, we can point them in the right direction and then turn the keys over to them," said Meyer.

"Recommendations will be pretty well thought out. They won't be simple sentence statements. They might be a series of steps to reach a specific goal or objective."

OFM suppliers that are BIFMA members and want to participate in GAP must contact the organization to put the wheels in motion. BIFMA will contact the global trade center to set up an interview schedule. According to Meyer, the entire GAP process will involve 30 hours of contact time that will span approximately one month.

Three OFM suppliers already have expressed interest in GAP and could begin the process within the next month. **MiBiz**