

INTERNATIONAL TRAINING PAYS OFF for Kalkaska-Based Company



THE PROGRAM

Over four years ago, the Van Andel Global Trade Center (VAGTC) designed and delivered a ten-week, international trade certificate program in Traverse City, MI. This program, coordinated with the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments, had an objective of training a company on both technical trade and international business entry strategies, while also requiring them to develop an international business plan to be presented at the end of the course. As part of this innovative program, participants were learning about international business models, while applying their own specific circumstances, in a team building atmosphere.

THE PAY OFF

One of the main advantages of international business development came to fruition in the case of Coding Products. They were able to sustain the domestic downturn with a stable and growing international market. Had they not been in a position to take advantage of the international markets with a clear, comprehensive, and proactive strategy, these results may not have come to pass. The Coding Products team firmly believes the international expansion was the result of a focused effort on training, and implementing the plan developed through the VAGTC training process. The individual business units not only developed their own individual plans, but integrated them into a larger company-wide plan that created a combined revenue potential that was hard for the Executive Management Team at Coding Products to ignore. This led to management buy-in and, more importantly, a budget to develop high-priority international markets.

Rob Fickling, one of the training participants who internalized the training, put it best when he said "this training provided us with the tools to sustain a downturn in the domestic economy, while positioning us for growth in the international business markets." The results speak for themselves.

The proof is in the numbers:

	2000	2001	2002	2003
Domestic Sales	+ 25%	- 25%	- 13%	+ 0.5%
International Sales	+ 54%	Holds Even	Holds Even	+ 25%

A multi-department team being involved in the training provided the impetus for the group to meet outside of class time to further develop ideas and strategies to move the international planning forward. Due to training, they were able to minimize the most costly mistakes that so often come with new international market entry, and optimize the opportunities that were presented. Rob further stated that "the training provided our Coding Products team a venue to both learn about the international marketplace while also creating a more formal team within the company to work on the issues."

TRAINING IS STILL THE KEY

The VAGTC will soon be taking a trip up to Kalkaska to address the next step in training for the entire Coding Products team. With 25% of their business being international, integration of global business concepts throughout their company will be crucial to their continued growth and success. Coding Products has recognized that their finance team needs training in addition to their commercial staff. They have identified specific issues such as logistics, documentation and foreign exchange as important elements in maintaining a positive and profitable revenue stream for the future. From the VAGTC perspective, it has been a great opportunity for us to take a look back at the impact of our programs in the past and measure them in the present, hard data that is often hard to come by. What we do know is this, if companies and their employees are committed to international market development, and overcome their fears of the unknown; the world truly becomes their marketplace.

For more information on Van Andel Global Trade Center, a unit of Grand Valley State University, visit www.vagtc.org or call (616) 331-6811.

THE COMPANY

Coding Products, a subsidiary of ITW, is based in Kalkaska, MI. It is made up of three divisions, all centered on the design, development and production of print media products, including but not limited to hot ink rolls, hot stamping ribbons, and thermal transfer ribbons.

In 1996, Coding Products and their individual business units began to dabble in international markets. However, from a company-wide perspective, there was not an international market mandate or formal team to tackle proactive market entry, as ITW has a decentralized management philosophy. While they continued to work on international markets throughout the late 90's, Coding Product's teams were not coordinated, organized, and informed enough to take a truly proactive and planned approach to their international markets. When the VAGTC offered the comprehensive international training program, they were able to sell their management on the program by convincing them there would be a payoff—and they were right.

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Rob Fickling, training participant