

International Trade Center at SIUE boosts clients' global success

November 8 2018 9:34 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - Local companies are finding increased success in global markets thanks, in part, to funding and support made possible by their partnership with the [International Trade Center](#) (ITC) at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

The ITC at SIUE is one of the State of Illinois' nine international trade centers which offer complimentary services to all Illinois businesses and institutions seeking assistance.

According to Margo Markopoulos, director of the Office of Trade and Investment (OTI) in the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the trade centers host a number of educational programs specifically geared towards exporters, in addition to identifying resources companies can use to access and appropriate foreign markets.

“Through collaboration with the ITCs, OTI is able to reach Illinois small businesses across the state to encourage export growth, which leads to the creations of jobs here at home,” Markopoulos said.

Three local companies located in Collinsville and Red Bud have benefitted from the educational programs, marketing and business expertise, and participation in international trade shows supported by OTI's ISTEP (Illinois State Trade and Export Promotion) funding they've been connected with via the ITC at SIUE.

“The ITC at SIUE is proud to assist these thriving businesses by introducing them to resources and tools to help them navigate the complexities of exporting, as well as making the necessary connections to help them build unique and profitable relationships worldwide,” said ITC at SIUE Director Silvia Torres Bowman. “I am motivated and inspired by their knowledge, passion, commitment and dedication to be the best in their respective industries. They truly exemplify the energy and vitality of our region.”

Mike Strobe, Vice President of Sales and Marketing of Marsh Shipping Supply Co, LLC (MSSC) in Collinsville says ISTEP funding was critical to his company's success during its summer 2018 travels to Mexico City for Expo Pack. After MSSC's long-time Mexico City distributor ceased its operations, Strobe says it was imperative the company find a new distributor.

“We successfully identified and appointed a new distributor in Mexico City, and it was 100 percent due to our presence at the show,” Strobe said. “There is no substitute for face-to-face discussions and finalizing terms. We now have a competent and successful relationship as does our end use customers of MSSC products.”

“The biggest help in our relationship with the ITC and OTI is education, and raising awareness of world events and opportunities,” he continued. “MSSC has a worldwide distribution network. Typically, our international sales make up 23-25 percent of our total annual sales. We are striving to aggressively grow our international sales. Our relationship with ITC and OTI allows MSSC to ‘act like a big company.’”

ITC at SIUE client Sev-Rend High-Performance Packaging, located in Collinsville, has also experienced heightened success through its participation in Expo Pack and use of other available resources.

“I’ve worked in small businesses in other parts of the country, and the small business support Illinois provides is absolutely spectacular,” said Sev-Rend Vice President of Sales and Marketing Tony O’Driscoll. “It’s been extremely on point, and definitely helps us sell, grow and export.”

“Our main goal in participating in Expo Pack was to develop relationships with potential distributors,” he explained. “By going to Mexico City through this group trade mission and with ISTEP funding, it was a much more reasonable investment to take the risk to participate. We were wildly successful, as we are now in initial contact with two formal distributors. Other valuable pieces of the trade mission were the contacts we made and presentations we had from various legal and export experts in Mexico.”

Additionally, Red Bud Industries, Inc. has benefitted from the support and funding provided by the OTI and ITC at SIUE. According to Treasurer Kathy Liefer, sales leads derived at the international trade shows in which they have participated have resulted in millions of dollars in business for the company.

“The assistance Red Bud Industries, Inc. has received with funding our participation at international trade shows has allowed us to refocus funds that were previously devoted to our participation in those events to new marketing campaigns that help increase our foreign marketing presence,” Liefer said. “Our continued attendance at each of the various trade shows allows us to build rapport and improve relationships with our existing customers, in addition to offering opportunities to appeal to new audiences.”

Liefer emphasizes the value of trade shows, saying they “provide the best opportunity to meet with key decision makers within our industry.”

The ITC at SIUE has also assisted these companies through support on marketing projects, the production of research reports, and by providing training on export procedures and classifications.

Illinois' strong trade center network is fostering success among small businesses by offering the technical export assistance needed to succeed in the global marketplace. Their assistance includes:

- Identifying and qualifying potential customers, distributors or agents
- Providing logistical support in preparation for international trade shows
- Developing industry specific market research
- Sharing insight on country specific market regulations

“Financial support available to Illinois businesses is sometimes the little nudge needed for a company to explore a new international market for their product,” Markopoulos concluded. “The Office of Trade and Investment helps mitigate the risk by preparing companies and bringing them face to face with potential customers around the world. Success ultimately comes to those that embrace the opportunities and continue to follow up and build those relationships overseas.”

The [International Trade Center](#) at [SIUE](#) serves entrepreneurs and small businesses in southern Illinois by providing individualized, no-cost export consultation, identification of foreign buyers, agents and/or distributors through trade leads, international market analysis and more.

The ITC is funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and [Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) as a service to the region's entrepreneurial and business community. It has a longtime partnership with the Illinois Office of Trade and Investment (OTI), which maintains a full-time staff of both foreign and domestic-based international trade and marketing experts. OTI also manages 6 foreign trade offices located in Belgium, Japan, Mexico, Canada, China and Israel.

As a key member of the Illinois SBDC Network, the International Trade Center delivers these important services to its clients while supporting the goals and objectives of both the [SIUE School of Business](#) and the University at large.

For more information on conducting business globally – and how to get started exporting – contact the ITC at International-Trade-Center@siue.edu or (618) 650-3851. For complete details regarding the ISTEP program, visit siue.edu/business/itc.