

Going Global - Repechage

If you think that your family business might not be able to compete as an international exporter, you probably don't realize all the tools and resources that are available to you! It is not only the mega-brands that are selling their products and services around the world. But the question frequently asked is how a smaller, less prominent company with little global expertise and few international connections survive in a competitive market.

Learning about the United States Commercial Service can be one solution for those companies that want to establish themselves overseas and beyond, providing the support that a family business can leverage!

When Repechage, a family-owned manufacturer of innovative and effective skin care products, decided to enter the global market, founder Lydia Sarfati knew that she would need help in order to identify partners who shared her commitment to combining excellent products with extraordinary customer service. It was 1980 and Lydia wasn't sure how to identify those unique businesses whose leadership shared a similar philosophy, family-focused culture and business model with hers.

What she learned was that she did not have to 'go it alone.' Instead, she turned to United States Commercial Service, the trade promotion arm of the U.S. Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration for help. Drawing on their expertise with companies around the world and their strong presence in over 75 foreign countries, their staff was able to help them find the perfect matches for Repechage's evolving needs. Along with finding companies that shared the same dedication to developing the highest quality skin care products, Repechage also required a high level of assurance that the companies they were meeting would meet their expectations in other significant ways. After completing extensive forms and applications, Lydia and her team were able to move forward with confidence in their new international partners.

Whether meeting with distributors located in Italy, Japan or Slovakia, they were always comfortable that the company recommended by US Commercial Service had been well-vetted. In-person meetings were arranged whenever possible. The Repechage leadership team quickly learned to trust the US Commercial Service staff to confirm the companies they were matched with would be both well-established in the local business community and financially stable. When Repechage's growth strategy was entry of their product line into a new country, or expanding their platform in an existing market, the extended reach of the US Commercial Services enabled them to help Repechage overcome any additional challenges that arose. Doing business in the United States is complicated enough, but engaging in international trade highlights many more complexities, including shipping

logistics, translation barriers, dependable financial transactions and the use of marketing techniques to help support a business-to-business platform. In each circumstance, the Commercial Service helped Repechage be aware of, and adjust to, the unique attitude and consumer shopping trends common to each country. Learning from the US Commercial Service experts regarding every new market they penetrated helped Repechage to more easily overcome potential hurdles and succeed on the world stage.

It can be assumed that a mid-size, privately-owned company would not typically have the capacity to identify appropriate, dependable foreign partners, open doors to expedite international business transactions, overcome the challenges of distance as well as language/communication skills and dealing with the nuances of working in unfamiliar surroundings. **And that is where the U S Commercial Service really makes a difference!** Giving its 'stamp of approval,' the department is able to facilitate the introductions that are essential for United States exporters, matching them up with viable options, arranging interviews virtually and in person, to help speed up the process.

From their Gold Key program designed to facilitate introductions to foreign partners to inclusion in goody bags and handouts at the American Pavilion and embassies abroad, the U.S. Commercial Service consistently puts the spotlight on American brands, easing the transition to the global stage for companies of all sizes and niches who are often middle market, family-owned entrepreneurs.

Holding fast to her family's legacy as the founders and owners of Repechage, Lydia proudly points to Repechage's independent status. While so many skin care/health and beauty competitors are now influenced by venture capitalists or have become part of a private equity company's portfolio, Repechage instead has leveraged the support and wide range of assets available through the U.S. Commercial Service to remain strong, adhering to its almost 45-year-old tradition!