

ExFiles

Exporting Success Stories

Canadian Organic Maple *Bath, New Brunswick*

BY PAUL BRENT

Maple syrup has been one of the Canada's most famous exports for generations. The veteran husband and wife business team of Gus and Sandra Hargrove have been exporting our country's most famous liquid crop for seven years now to those hungry for a taste of Canada in Asia, Germany and the United States.

Virtually the entire output of Canadian Organic Maple Company's 100,000 taps is exported outside the country's border "We are trying to sell the Great White North and a pure natural product that is good for you," said Gus Hargrove.

The Bath, N.B. family-owned company typically sells its organic syrup to distributors to health food stores in those countries and has benefited from the rising consumer interest in organic foods. It has built its international customer base of approximately 100 distributors around the globe primarily through trade shows and visits to the company web site.

Both in their mid-fifties, the Hargroves began Canadian Organic Maple Company as a business they could operate as they eased into retirement. Today they have six full-time workers and another 18 part-timers who work about 10 months per year and are trying to grow their production and sales by about 20 per cent annually.

The Hargroves owe some of their success to their geographic location. "We are in the area where McCain Foods' headquarters are and we have seen how successful they were exporting and most of the people here have good skills in food manufacturing," said Gus Hargrove.



Photo: Courtesy of Canadian Organic Maple

▲ Canadian Organic Maple is enjoying export success due to increased interest in organic foods.

Over its seven-year history, the maple syrup company had to struggle to get its product recognized as "organic" in various jurisdictions as well as periodic export headaches such as a West Coast dock strike which held up Asian shipments.

Perhaps the owners' biggest challenge is ensuring they get paid by faraway buyers. "Like a lot of people we have made a few shipments that we didn't get paid for," said Gus Hargrove. "After that, we insisted that they either prepay or insure it through EDC and that has worked well."

The Hargrove's advice for those looking to tap international markets is as simple as their tasty product: "If the customer wants it they will pay for it or buy insurance for it and don't let it leave your door until you are sure you are going to get your money," he said. "If EDC won't insure the sale, you have a pretty good idea that the customer doesn't have very good credit."

www.canadianorganicmaple.com ■

ASI Group

St. Catherines, Ontario

BY PAUL BRENT

ASI Group has made an international reputation for itself by taking on jobs that are too dangerous for humans. The St. Catherines, Ont.-based outfit is a world leader in the operation of Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) used to inspect tunnels and pipelines below ground or below the water.

With a fleet of 10 custom-designed robots in a range of sizes and capabilities that can travel up to 10 kilometers, assess and, in some cases, remotely repair damage in conditions humans can't or won't reach, ASI's expertise has taken it to exotic locales in South America, Europe and beyond. Recent contracts include an assignment to three deepwater leaks at the Ponce Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant Deep Ocean Outfall in Puerto Rico and the hiring to design, build and operate an underwater robot to inspect New York City tunnels.

"We have very little competition in the ROV business and this New York contract really catapults us well beyond anyone else, the technology that is going to be developed for that project is really pushing the envelope," said ASI President Carmen Sferrazza.

ASI launched its robot-inspection and repair business in 1991 and quickly found that tracking down potential clients was at least as challenging as finding leaks in 800 feet of murky water. The company's solution was to establish ASI as an expert in the emerging field by producing a series



Photo: Courtesy of ASI Group

▲ ASI Groups' Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) take on the jobs that are too dangerous for human beings.

of technical papers on the use of ROVs for dangerous tunnel and pipeline inspection. It also educated the relatively small population of international engineering consultants and made itself a fixture at industry trade shows.

"Word of mouth is out there now and we are well known as leaders in this area so that initial hard work in marketing really paid off. Now it is just maintaining our visibility in the market, said Sferrazza.

EDC has provided accounts receivable insurance and bonding to support the company's international contracts, which account for about 25 per cent of ASI's annual revenue. "Financing and bonding and risk are major challenges for a small company like ours," said Sferrazza. "They have been very supportive. I don't think we would be able to be in the international business if it wasn't for their help."

His advice for those looking to crack international markets? "Never take no for a first answer. Just be persistent and there are ways of getting around some of the issues when you are a smaller company." That advice even applies to EDC, Sferrazza advises. "Never be afraid to ask questions of EDC because there is a difference between what you read on the Internet and what can be done when you start looking at interesting projects." www.asigroup.com ■

Digital Dispatch Systems

Richmond, British Columbia

BY PAUL BRENT

The days of taxi cab drivers getting their fares from the voice of a dispatcher are all but gone, due in large part to the success of Richmond, B.C.'s Digital Dispatch Systems (DDS), the world leader in designing wireless dispatch systems for large taxi fleets.

The 20-year-old company designs, manufactures and installs wireless communications systems for the automated dispatch of taxi fleets. The most obvious benefit of the system for operators is that it eliminates the inevitable clashes between drivers and dispatchers over presumed favoritism. However the DDS dispatch systems generate a significant return on investment for fleet operators by allowing them to manage more calls, and dispatch more vehicles, more efficiently.

"One of the driving reasons (for adoption) is it eliminates favoritism over the dispatching system," said Cliff Snelling, Vice-President of Marketing with DDS. "There is always the feeling that a dispatcher is favoring certain drivers or taxis over others." Going into a data mode for fleet dispatch also eliminates the practice of competitors "scooping" fares by listening in on the old-style voice network. "It does not happen much anymore because most large companies are on a system similar to ours or use ours."

DDS has successfully sold its wireless dispatch networks to approximately 300 large taxi operators on four continents. Travelers in foreign capitals such as Helsinki, Stockholm and Paris stand a good chance of getting in a DDS-outfitted cab; DDS has outfitted huge fleets of up to 5,000 vehicles in those cities.

EDC's services such as facilitating performance bonds and insuring contracts have proved invaluable to DDS in cracking foreign markets, Snelling said. With monster-sized jobs such as outfitting a taxi fleet to service a metropolis such as Paris, the performance bond is sizeable and

would be too much for Digital Dispatch to shoulder without EDC's financial backing.

"We wouldn't necessarily be able to do that on our own because it ties up a lot of our money to do that," he said. "If we want to bid and do multiple projects at the same time, that money has to be in a bank somewhere and is a dead weight on an operation."

EDC has also assisted Digital Dispatch's sales pitch by providing a financing option for potential customers. With the company's solution costing about \$2,000 per vehicle, going wireless is an expensive proposition, DDS acknowledges. "Whether or not our customer actually takes advantage of the EDC loan or not, it offers a way to promote the company and go through the sales process that might not have happened if we did not have the option," Snelling said. "It's a big capital outlay and they can take a deep breath and say 'Okay, I have at least one way to finance that.'" www.digital-dispatch.com ■



Photo: Courtesy of Digital Dispatch Systems

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