



Want to Take Your Business Global and Succeed? The Formula is Specialization and Persistence

For John Jastremski, senior vice-president of business development at MDS in Ottawa, it's expertise and persistence that count most when competing in a global market.

The aerospace engineering company grew out of a construction company in the 1970s and was incorporated in 1985 as a provider of turnkey engineering solutions to gas turbine engine manufacturers around the world. "We started doing international work right away because of the growth in the aviation business worldwide," says Jastremski. In 2007, he and four other business leaders bought out the original owner and increased their focus on the growth of their service business.



John Jastremski

Today MDS has over 200 employees, and subsidiary operations in Europe, Russia and the United States. It services customers in close to 20 countries, including big-name aviation players such as Pratt & Whitney, Solar Turbines, Rolls-Royce, Siemens, MTU and General Electric.

Because the company did something unique, the partners saw potential for leveraging their knowledge and reputation to open doors in new markets. Jastremski says while turnkey solution delivery (i.e. designing and building contracts for gas turbine engine testing) has been their bread and butter for some time, more recently the focus has been on expanding its engineering service and support offerings within the same market.

"In 2008, when the economy was slow, our service business remained stable. We made a decision at that point to focus on the growth of our service business to shelter us from the variable nature of our 'project business'."

Services rank among the fastest growing export sectors for Canada, says Danielle Goldfarb, associate director of the Conference Board of Canada's Global Commerce Centre in Toronto. "There is huge potential for growth in that area. All the goods and products we produce have value-added services associated with them."

Canada boasts considerable knowledge in areas such as engineering, architecture and financial services, she adds. "You can sell a vast amount of that expertise. That's why a lot of small to mid-sized companies can succeed in these areas, as long as they're properly prepared."

The foundations for international success start with building long-term relationships and knowing how to build on the strength of an existing reputation, she explains. "That could mean getting involved in global trade fairs, establishing a digital presence, or piggy-backing on the resources of a local company – there are many ways to do it."

Another integral part of success is having a coherent strategy that builds on success as you gain experience in new markets. "After you've entered your first market and overcome the challenges, you can build on what you learned for the next one you choose to tackle," Goldfarb notes.

She also sees tremendous flexibility when it comes to diversifying services, whether the expertise is rooted in aerospace, mining or automotive. "It's the potential that's important."

Jastremski believes the company's success is rooted in the depth of its world-class expertise, and a strong entrepreneurial culture that isn't afraid to bring new ideas forward to its customers. "Responding to [requests for quotations] are not the only way to get business. We spend time really understanding our customers and providing them with unsolicited solutions that could represent incremental efficiencies for them."

A recent example was when MDS aided in the establishment of a cold-weather test facility in Northern Manitoba. Today a significant percentage of the world's cold-weather certification testing for new airplane engines is done at the site. "It is extremely rewarding to be a catalyst in the creation of a Canadian technical centre of excellence that is now recognized around the globe," he says.

CIBC Tips: Differentiate from the Competition

As your company grows, so does your knowledge of your products and services, your industry, your market and a number of other factors related to your business. This increasing expertise is extremely valuable as it allows you to continually improve your ability to service customers and ultimately, distinguishes you from the competition.

Consider the following opportunities to leverage the skills and knowledge that you have developed:

1. **Diversify** Use your understanding of customers to identify benefits you can provide that satisfy additional needs. This may be additional products or services, or entry into new markets.
2. **Innovate** Create a culture that rewards employees for providing insights and ideas that leverage the company's expertise to help identify new opportunities
3. **Expand** Market the reputation you have built to attract new clients and ask existing customers for more business. Don't be afraid to ask for referrals.

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