



Canadian Trade Successes 11-06
Emerge Knowledge Design Inc.

IF WASTE IS THE PROBLEM, EMERGE IS THE SOLUTION

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Key Quotation:

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada's (DFAIT) programs and services help smaller companies establish a foothold in the export market and came through with financial assistance for Emerge, to be repaid when Emerge began increasing sales in their target market. Rick Penner says DFAIT'S Trade Regional Office also played an important role, providing counseling and market-entry support services. "The people at Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada have been "important partners in the company's success" says Penner.

Story details:

Waste management is everyone's problem. And everyone, particularly governments, is constantly seeking more efficient and more effective solutions. In recent years, a growing number of U.S. state governments have started to look north for help, particularly when it comes to managing their environmental information. The lucky ones—and at last count there were 20—have signed on with Emerge Knowledge Design Inc., a Winnipeg-based company dedicated to improving the way environmental information is managed.

While Emerge has been around since 2001, it has drawn the most attention since 2004. "That's when we introduced Re-TRAC," company president Rick Penner explains. "Re-TRAC

is a complete online data-management solution that government can use for monitoring recycling and solid waste. It's not only the best program of its kind in the world, it's the only program of its kind."

Before Emerge created Re-TRAC, says Penner, the company had "bumped along" for about three years from project to project, hiring when things were good, laying off when they weren't. "We realized if we really wanted to develop Re-TRAC, really take advantage of what it could do, we'd have to start over. So we laid off most of the people we had at that time, cut our expenses to the bone and focused solely on Re-TRAC."

The company also turned to two Government of Canada agencies for help. The National Research Council's Industrial Research Assistance Program (IRAP) provided technical support as well as financial assistance for Emerge to hire a research assistant. Meanwhile, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada's programs and services, dedicated to helping smaller companies establish a foothold in the export market, came through with financial assistance, to be repaid when Emerge began increasing sales in their target market. Rick Penner says the Winnipeg Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada regional office also played an important role, providing counseling and market-entry support services.

All of these organizations, says Penner, and particularly the people at Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, have been "important partners in the company's success."

And that success just seems to keep coming. Since it established a beachhead in Minnesota more than three years ago, Emerge has expanded into 20 states, and a score of other county and state governments are considering proposals from Emerge. At least three states—Nebraska, Rhode Island and South Carolina—are using Emerge and Re-TRAC to gather and analyze waste management information provided by counties and municipalities.

Re-TRAC, too, is winning more attention. The recycling and solid waste data management system was recently nominated for the Outstanding Innovation Award at a National Recycling Coalition conference in Minneapolis.

"We now meet the waste information management needs of more than 20 million people in the United States," says Penner. "We employ nine people and fully expect to triple that total in the next year. Thanks in large part to the help we got when we needed it most, all of our business—that's 100 percent—is in the United States."