



Canadian Trade Successes 11-06
Suitcase Interactive

SUITCASE SETS A COURSE FOR THE U.S. MARKET

Company contact information:

Suitcase Interactive

Ryan Gill, CEO

Calgary, Alberta

Tel: (403) 243-9935

Email: ryan@thinksuitcase.com

www.thinksuitcase.com

Key Quotation:

“The folks at Export Link, an organization funded by Western Economic Diversification Canada, were remarkable. They put us in touch with the Canadian Consulate General in Chicago, they provided contacts, they answered questions, and they pointed out hurdles that we would probably face and how to overcome them” said Ryan Gill.

Story details:

For a high-tech company—they’re recognized internationally for their web design and development expertise—Suitcase Interactive certainly chose a low-tech approach when deciding to grow their business. The Calgary-based marketing and communications company simply picked up a copy of the luxury magazine, the *ROBB Report*, scoured the ads for potential clients, picked up the phone and started dialling.

Several calls later, Suitcase Interactive had taken the first step to winning a major contract—redesigning the web site of the Chicago-area Burger Boat Company, the oldest and most respected custom yacht builder in the United States. For Suitcase Interactive founder and CEO, Ryan Gill, it not only meant a presence in the lucrative U.S. market, it also validated the innovative approach that he and his two partners (Joel Goldberg and Trent Martens) have set for their young company.

“The idea of using the *ROBB Report* to identify potential clients came from our advisory board, a group of senior business people we asked to review our operations and offer advice,” Gill explains. “We’re a young company (Gill is 29) with young people so we felt we needed the input of more experienced professionals.” The people at Suitcase meet with their board members—who have declined any form of payment for their services—three or four times a year.

Suitcase landed the contract with Burger, whose yachts typically sell for \$7 million and up. That literally launched Suitcase into the big leagues of advertising and marketing overnight. Again, says Gill, the assistance of experienced outside people helped his company meet the challenge.

“The folks at Export Link, an organization funded by Western Economic Diversification Canada, were remarkable. They put us in touch with the Canadian Consulate General in Chicago, they provided contacts, they answered questions, and they pointed out hurdles that we would probably face and how to overcome them.” For their part, the people at Export Link Canada say the philosophy that drives Suitcase—that if you really believe in what you do, you’ll succeed—is a common quality of companies that eventually find success abroad.

Perhaps the most compelling testimony to the value and depth of assistance that Suitcase received from Export Link is that Gill now regularly speaks to other groups about the advantages and potential pitfalls of doing business in the United States.

“We believe in strong personal relationships with our clients so that meant flying to Chicago on a regular basis. We also conducted a week-long interactive audit of their web site to see how the company communicated. And we interviewed clients and employees to see how they felt about the site. That can drive up the costs pretty quickly.” So getting inside advice from Export Link on how to manage money was priceless.

Today, Suitcase Interactive is building on its success in the United States. For example, when it opened its doors in 2001, it conducted less than 10 percent of its business in the United States. By the end of 2006, Gill says 60 percent of its business will come from the U.S.

“Over the past year or two, we’ve attended more and more trade shows in the States. We’ve made new contacts, established new relationships and secured more business. No doubt, the people at Export Link have helped make all that possible.”