

CLIENT SUCCESS: THE WAGNER COMPANIES

Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership

The middle class in the rest of the world has developed tremendously over the last 20 years. There's way more out there than there is here. The opportunity to serve new markets is phenomenal.

Richard Kettler,
President

Exporting for Growth

The Wagner Companies, a 120-person, family-owned company located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, manufactures and stocks standard products for metal fabricators and also produces custom products – primarily for handrails. Comprised of three product divisions (Architectural Catalog, Architectural Custom and Wagner Industrial), Wagner fabricates custom and stock railing components.

Situation:

When the construction industry experienced an extended period of softness stemming from the overall downturn in the economy, The Wagner Companies began taking a serious look at boosting its exporting activity. The company faced downward pressure in the domestic market, prompting a closer look at exporting opportunities. “My great great-grandfather was a metal worker, my grandfather was a metal worker and my father was a metal worker. I guess rust is in my blood,” said Robert Wagner, chief executive officer of The Wagner Companies. In an effort to develop a more defined exporting strategy, Wagner became part of the first class of ExporTech™, a NIST MEP program offered by the WMEP since 2009.

Solution:

ExporTech consists of three intense sessions scheduled one month apart. Coaching and assistance are provided between the sessions. It brings together as many as eight non-competing firms to create an exporting strategy to tap into new markets. Companies target two or three countries that have the greatest revenue potential and least risk when it comes to implementing or expanding an exporting strategy.

The Wagner Companies has been on an exporting journey over the past four years that has generated increased revenue for the business as a result of expanding its overseas markets. Since participating in the ExporTech program, the company has been specified by architects for construction projects across the globe, developed product engineering improvements based on serving overseas markets and conditions, and improved logistics and government policy awareness and compliance throughout the company. Prior to its participation in ExporTech, Wagner's exporting activity primarily focused on Canada and England. Now, the company is shipping products to countries like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Results:

- Increased export sales 40% each year
- Increased countries serviced from 2 to 16
- Created a global market awareness and worldwide contacts

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