AUTOMATION ALLEY™

Small Business Export Initiative China Trade Mission 2002

Bob Sullivan, president and CEO of The Wireless Source, based in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, had traveled to China before. But this was a few years ago when the markets were just opening up, and only the large, international corporations had a strong presence in the foreign markets. Coincidentally, about the time that statistics were showing China as the world's largest wireless telephone market, Automation Alley's Small Business Export Initiative had announced its trade mission to China. Sullivan jumped at the opportunity of a return trip to China– this time, to create and develop invaluable business relationships.

The Wireless Source, one of the world's leading distributors of new, used and remanufactured wireless phones, decided to take part in the trade mission. While in China, Sullivan and his staff planned to meet with Chinese government officials to propose a program to refurbish used cell phones and redistribute them in rural areas– in an effort to provide affordable cell phones to all Chinese citizens.

"China has the largest mobile phone network in the world. Yet only 10 percent of its population is currently on the network. Our plan provides an economically viable way to provide access to affordable cellular phones, the key to accessing the network," Sullivan said. "In many cases, a new phone is not an option, as it could cost more than 30 percent of a typical Chinese worker's annual income."

On May 5, 2002, Sullivan and representatives from 13 other companies made the trip to China for an 11-day trade mission, taking them to Beijing, Shanghai and Suzhou. On this trade mission, they would be attending Gold Key meetings arranged by the U.S. Department of Commerce. These meetings pair U.S. companies with Chinese companies, possibly resulting in business partnerships. Sullivan said that the Gold Key meetings were outstanding and beyond expectation. As a result of these meetings, The Wireless Source plans to expand their recently opened office in China. The long-range plan is to bring 30 or 40 additional people on staff.

With the pre-arranged Gold Key meetings, Sullivan said that all companies participating in the trade mission agreed on one thing: They wouldn't have had nearly as much

The Wireless Source President and CEO, Bob Sullivan with L. Brooks Patterson, Oakland County Executive.

success going overseas alone as they did with Automation Alley's Small Business Export Initiative. "The quality of these match-ups and thoroughness of the meetings could not be matched," said Sullivan. In addition to exceeding the companies' expectations, Sullivan notes that the support from Automation Alley, the U.S. Department of Commerce and assistance from the corporate sponsors (Butzel Long, Comerica and Moore Stephens Doeren Mayhew) was invaluable.

Sullivan also commented that having all of the accommodations (transportation, lodging, etc.) taken care of ahead of time and included in the trade mission cost made it very simple for the companies to focus on conducting business, rather than worrying about the little things.

Sullivan said he would definitely consider attending another trade mission. "There is no way any individual company could leverage this much energy and potential on their own, without the assistance of Automation Alley," he said.

If you are interested in participating in a trade mission, please contact Hayes W. Jones, Export Manager, at 248.975.9636, or online at jonesh@co.oakland.mi.us.

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