

EXfiles

Exporting Success Stories

Many of Canada's most aggressive exporters are small- and medium-sized enterprises. To help encourage the development of this prized sector, EDC recently sponsored The National Bank of Canada's "PME exportatrice" awards. In this issue we salute the Quebec-based winners of those awards and highlight some of the challenges they faced on the road to success.

BY PETER DIEKMAYER

iBwave Solutions *Montreal, Quebec*

■ Bwave Solutions developed a unique telecommunications software application: a tool to help simplify in-building project management for operators, integrators and equipment manufacturers. Now it can't sell them fast enough.

Mario Bouchard recently returned from the flourishing Middle Eastern financial capital of Dubai and landed in Montreal with a big smile on his face. The company he heads sells software that enables telecom wireless providers to better manage the services they provide, and his initial assessments of demand for his company's products there were highly positive.

"Our tools are primarily used by RF engineers within large new buildings such as office towers and shopping malls," said Bouchard. "Of the 10 or 12 major construction projects that are on the books in Dubai, our technology is slated to be used in all of them."

iBwave's success in Dubai is a familiar story to Bouchard. Despite the fact that the company has only been around since 2003, it has already landed more than 150 clients in 46 countries across five continents. Close to 99 per cent of its revenues now come from outside of Quebec and 95 per cent from outside of Canada.

According to Bouchard the company has faced numerous challenges. For example, iBwave's wide client base has forced it to operate in a variety of currencies and has exposed it to considerable foreign exchange risk. Fortunately, a new partner has appeared.



Photo: Jupiter Images Unlimited

▲ Almost 95 per cent of iBwave's revenues come from exports, to 150 clients in 46 countries.

"EDC has become an increasingly reliable option for us," says Bouchard. "Their Foreign Exchange Facility Guarantee enables us to buy forward currency contracts without putting down the usual collateral. This provides us with a considerable working capital advantage."

One development that Bouchard will be watching during coming months is the effect the global economic slowdown will have on commercial construction. "When I arrived in Dubai, the cover page of the first newspaper said that activity had slowed. There are cranes everywhere, but with the stock market down, some firms have no money to finish their projects."

"But things are not slowing everywhere. Frankly, our major challenge right now is finding skilled sales people with the right technical knowledge to sell our products in foreign markets," says Bouchard. "We have an excellent window of opportunity and we want to exploit it."

Another advantage that iBwave's technology provides, says Bouchard, is the ability to sell on a world stage. "Right now things are slowing in the United States," says Bouchard. "However Western Europe and Japan have so far not been as affected. So we can focus efforts there and in other markets that are still growing."

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