



OFFICE SHADOW USES REVIEW TO TAKE THE RISK OUT OF EXPORT

BACKGROUND

Office Shadow is a Surrey-based, fast growing software business specialising in developing and marketing solutions for the planning and management of business risks like disaster recovery and for business continuity planning.

Office Shadow achieved a strong market position in the UK over two years ago and Roland Johnson, now its Americas' Vice President, explained it was then they started to take the idea of export seriously, "The software business is very investment intensive so it is critical we get sales volume quickly to deliver returns. Focusing on export creates sufficient levels of revenue growth and it helps us counter the threat of competition. Also, we discovered that many of our UK clients were going international themselves and needed the support of a similarly internationally-minded company. These factors combined made a serious commitment to export essential to the future of the business. We are very ambitious. By the end of 2007, we expect export to account for 25 per cent of our revenues. By the end of 2008, we want to see this up to 50 per cent. To do this we must get our communication right."

THE CHALLENGE

Early moves towards globalisation by the company were not as productive as Office Shadow had hoped, "To start with we tried to find some partners with whom to work overseas. While we did see some revenue from international markets, we knew we had to take control and start our own overseas operations. It was at this point we turned to the Export Communications Review (ECR) and the help of Sarah Carroll, BCC-Accredited Export Communications Consultant, to prepare for our move to the US last year"

"The quality of our consultant was excellent and their advice, knowledge and ability to get to the heart of the problem quickly, was a real help. It is great value for money."

Roland Johnson –
Americas' Vice President

Hit the world running ^{UK}

"We found out about the ECR via the UK Trade & Investment's Passport to Export and thought immediately this looked like a valuable service for a company in our position. We are still small and while we are strong generalists, we don't have a specialist marketing department or the international communication skills we knew we needed at this critical stage".

"I felt the ECR would help to plug this gap and give us a good critique of our planned international marketing. I was right."

THE SOLUTION

Office Shadow's Review focused on ensuring marketing literature had impact in North America. The Review recommendations included: widespread use of US English; development of clearer messages that presented an appropriate 'global' feel for the business and key revisions to the website.

"We acted on some of the recommendations very quickly. We revised our website and changed simple but critical things. For example, we had been using the flags of Spain and France to show we had translated our website. Our consultant explained this wouldn't work with Spanish or French speaking Americans and Canadians. They aren't Spanish or French so the flags clearly weren't going to relate to them. The ECR delivered some really quick wins that improved the effectiveness of our communication. We still have some more work to do to implement all the recommendations but we are well on our way."

THE OUTCOME

"The Review delivered a lot of value to us. It still acts as a constant reminder for us not just to implement all the recommendations but also to keep reviewing our communication practices to ensure they remain as effective as possible. It delivers a long-term value to our business we didn't expect." Roland said.

"Putting yourself through such a stringent review forces you to think critically about your activities. It challenges your thinking and knowledge. We got a lot of value out of discovering we were doing quite a few things right."

"I wouldn't hesitate to recommend the service to anyone serious about export, particularly small businesses that don't have a marketing department or the expertise in-house. It is so much more cost effective to get access to these skills this way than through hiring."

THE EXPORT COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW

An Export Communications Review costs £500 + VAT, however SMEs may be eligible for a UK Trade & Investment subsidy of £350 towards the cost of the review.

For more information, please visit International Trade at www.chamberonline.co.uk or contact the ECR team at the address below.

You can contact your local ECR Consultant Sarah Carroll who covers London and East Sussex on +44 (0)7711 132179 or sarah.carroll@ecrconsultants.org.

The British Chambers of Commerce manages the Export Communications Review on behalf of UK Trade & Investment.

UK Trade & Investment is the United Kingdom Government's lead organisation for supporting UK companies in overseas business, and attracting inward investment.

**The British Chambers of Commerce | 4 Westwood House | Westwood Business Park
Coventry | CV4 8HS**

**Tel: +44 (0)24 7669 4484 | Fax: +44 (0)24 7669 5844
ecr@britishchambers.org.uk | www.chamberonline.co.uk**