With the support of UK Trade & Investment (UKTI), inventor Mike Woods from That Games Company has developed an international network of contacts that has resulted in his games being sold in Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and India.

Over the past 40 years, former journalist and PR boss Mike Woods has invented over 100 games, many of which he sells through his business, That Games Company. His best seller is ‘Take’, a board game with more moves than chess but only three rules. This has been sold in over 20 countries around the world, and played on the QE2, UK warships, cruise liners and seven nuclear submarines.

“All our products have been invented in-house, so they are unique and unavailable except through ourselves and our partners,” says Mike. “As well as licensing my games for other people to produce, I’ve been commissioned to create games for the British Olympics Committee, Cadbury’s and Saudi Arabian Airlines, to name but a few.”

Focus on export
In 2009, Mike attended a UKTI seminar in Cheltenham about business opportunities in Mexico and Brazil. Whilst there, he mentioned to an International Trade Adviser (ITA) that he’d like to go to the Nuremberg Toy Fair which was due to take place two weeks later. The ITA arranged a grant towards the airfare. Once there, Mike met Parksons Ltd (now Parksons Cartamundi), an Indian company that prints playing cards. He suggested a partnership and three weeks later flew to Mumbai to iron out the details. Parksons took licenses for two Disney games that Mike invented, ‘Brainiac 15’s’ and ‘Word it Up’ and a cricket game, ‘Twenty 20’. Another Indian partner that Mike met on the trip, BS Industries of Mumbai, has since taken a licence for ‘Rummi-Soc’, which is scheduled for launch before the World Cup in Brazil in July.

Meanwhile, Mike teamed up with an American partner, POS, following a UKTI supported visit to the New York Toy Fair. POS has licensed card game ‘Armchair Golf’ for distribution to over 400 outlets across North America.
“As a result of UKTI’s assistance, I have been able to visit toy and game shows in Nuremberg, India, the US and Australia. Having the grant from UKTI made the difference between me going or not”

Mike Woods, Chairman, That Games Company

“You can’t find international partners by sitting at home in the UK,” says Mike. “You need to get out and about to trade shows. As a result of UKTI’s assistance, I have been able to visit toy and game shows in Nuremberg, India, the US and Australia. Nuremberg 2010 was the catalyst that really got me on the right track for exporting. It’s the biggest toy show in the world, attended by over 80,000 people, and the first fair I had been to outside of the UK. Having the grant from UKTI made the difference between me going or not.”

Continued growth

In 2010, Mike used UKTI’s Market Visit Support to make the most of a visit to Australia for the Sydney Toy Fair. He benefited from a special promotion that UKTI was running with British Airways and got free business class flights to Sydney. Once there, the local UKTI team gave him space in their offices overlooking Sydney Harbour from which to base himself. At the fair, he met several companies interested in his products and has since designed a range of children’s games to be sold in Australia.

In 2012, Mike joined Passport to Export, the UKTI programme that helps businesses to prepare for international markets. He is now on the Gateway to Global Growth programme, which give him access to advice and funding towards the costs of visiting new markets.

As a result of a further visit to Australia in March 2013, Mike has connected with two new partners. One now sells a range of wooden games that he invented to order. The second has licensed two of his games, ‘Change the Word’ and ‘Armchair Golf’, which will both be launched this October in Australia and New Zealand.

Meanwhile, another Indian partner has launched a Google Android app of ‘Change the Word’ and is due to launch an IPhone app of ‘Take’. A Canadian company is also in the final stages of developing an IPhone app for Mike’s word game, which will be designated ‘Word in Word’.

“I’m a one-man business, and having the encouragement of UKTI means a lot,” says Mike. “Through Passport to Export I learned things that I might not have picked up on otherwise. It was also reassuring to be forewarned of potential pitfalls that exporters can come across. I’m hoping to return to Mumbai in October for the Indian Toy Fair and to Nuremberg in February 2015. I’ll also go back to Australia to follow up with the launch of further products with my Australian distributors. I’m now designing games for a Yorkshire based company and I hope that I’ll be able to use my overseas contacts to help them export my games around the world. If you’re thinking of exporting, don’t be put off by the distances involved in travelling to new markets. It’s worth the effort and UKTI can support you along the way.”

The export advantage

International trade has always played an important role in the UK economy. Today it accounts for almost 20 per cent of the nation’s GDP.

Exporting can be challenging, but the benefits can be the difference between profit and loss. Research carried out by UKTI shows that:
• companies that export become 34 per cent more productive in the first year alone
• 59 per cent of companies that exported either developed a new product or service or modified an existing one
• 85 per cent of companies reported that exporting led to a ‘level of growth not otherwise possible’
• 87 per cent said exporting had significantly improved their profile or credibility
• 73 per cent said exporting had increased the commercial lifespan of products or services

For more information about exporting please go to gov.uk/ukti

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