Locally Made Fans Stir Up New Markets Abroad

Process Barron, a local manufacturer of large fans used to clean air in industrial factories, has expanded its business internationally thanks to the expansion plans of its two owners, Ken Nolen and Cliff Moss. The company, which began in Birmingham, Alabama in the early 1970s, currently operates out of Pelham, Alabama.

Process Barron has used international business to maintain their 200+ employment numbers and payroll during the recent economic downturn. However, the company’s first ventures into foreign sales were not ultimately successful.

Nolen and Moss quickly began to learn more about what foreign buyers need and what is involved in the process of selling large equipment internationally. They also began to send members of their management team to educational exporting seminars, which were offered by the University of Alabama International Trade Center (AITC) and other export organizations including the U.S. Department of Commerce in Birmingham.

Another challenge that Process Barron faced involved financing and payment terms to win export customers. Many of Process Barron’s competitors sold products to customers on open account, meaning credit terms. Process Barron was initially reluctant to offer credit terms to new customers, but discovered their business was losing potential export customers as a result.

Carolyn Turner at AITC recommended that they consider a federal government export credit insurance program to help evaluate foreign customers and insure receivables. This program worked for Process Barron and opened up new export customers that are willing to take the credit insurance route for purchasing the company’s products.

Process Barron continues to pursue export sales and focus on potential overseas markets; specifically in Latin America. To date, exports have grown from zero to between 5% and 10% of total sales.