



UKTI opens doors for Urban Front in US

Fast facts

Company: Urban Front

Industry: Manufacturing

Target Market: US

UKTI Services: Passport to Export, Gateway to Global Growth, Export Marketing Research Scheme

www.urbanfront.co.uk



British door manufacturer Urban Front joined a UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) -supported Santander trade mission to the US. As a result, one of its speciality doors is now hanging in the British Consulate, it recently won an award from Houzz, the country's leading platform for home remodelling and design, and it's bringing in around £30,000 a month in sales from this market.

When Elizabeth Assaf and her husband Nabil renovated their house they couldn't find a front door they liked. So, Nabil, who had always enjoyed DIY projects, decided to make a contemporary wooden door himself by hand. The door ended up becoming a showpiece of the home, with people stopping by asking where they got it. With so much interest, the couple did some market research and decided in 2005 to start their own door manufacturing company, Urban Front.

The company designs and manufactures steel-reinforced contemporary hardwood doors and garage doors. It works with each client individually, looking closely at the entire property before deciding on a precise design. The doors are then manufactured in Urban Front's Buckinghamshire-based factory, which has a staff of 12 and a turnover of just under £1 million a year.

"Over the past nine years, there has been a surge of interest in security doors, and we were well placed to fill that demand," says Elizabeth. "We offer a unique, bespoke product that suits each individual customer. We place an equal emphasis on design and performance, with some doors reaching a Passive House certification. While our main market is in the UK, thanks to our website new customers from around the world have found us and placed orders with 20 per cent of what we make going overseas.

Looking to export

Knowing that there was a demand for its products beyond the UK, Urban Front got in touch with UKTI in 2010. Having been assigned an International Trade Adviser (ITA), the company signed up to Passport to Export, the UKTI programme that helps businesses to prepare for international markets. Through Passport, Elizabeth and Nabil attended workshops that help businesses learn the basics of exporting, including how to select target markets and distributors. The courses also helped Elizabeth develop a network of business contacts with whom she regularly speaks to compare notes on exporting.

Later in 2010, Elizabeth made two research trips to California, receiving funding from UKTI through Passport to Export towards the travel expenses. While there, she learned more about the market for Urban Front's products and gained a greater understanding of the local competition.

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Elizabeth Assaf, Founder, Urban Front

Then in 2012, Elizabeth came across Santander bank’s Breakthrough programme, which aims to help fast-growth UK SMEs break into new markets. That winter, she joined a Breakthrough trade mission targeted at women-run businesses to New York that was organised in part with UKTI. As one of companies on the programme, Elizabeth attended a UKTI-sponsored networking reception at the British Consulate. While there, she approached the Consul General and told him how Urban Front had recently designed a door featuring the Union Jack. Impressed, the Consul General asked if it could be installed in the residence, and requested a meeting the next morning to iron out the details.

“Three months after I met with the Consul General, the Union Jack door was hanging as a showpiece in his residence,” says Elizabeth. “The Consul has since told me that every time he brings a visitor into his offices, he tells them about the door and how it came to hang there. You can’t ask for a better endorsement than that! This has given our profile and reputation a real boost in the US, and the UK as well thanks to the many positive articles written in the press.”

New markets

While Elizabeth was in New York, she asked UKTI for help identifying distributors on the East Coast. UKTI made an introduction to an experienced distributor based there who she then appointed. UKTI also gave the company information about US-based interior design websites. Having listed the business on Houzz, the country’s leading platform for home remodelling and design it went on to win the site’s Best of Houzz 2014 Award. This has helped raise the company’s profile and has given it additional credibility in the US. As a result of its visits to the US, Urban Front is now selling at least three doors a month, at around £10,000 each.

With a growing customer base throughout the US, Urban Front is considering appointing a distributor and opening a showroom in California, where it has seen a strong demand for its products. To finalise its plans, the company applied for and received funding through UKTI’s Export Marketing Research Scheme toward a research trip in June. Elizabeth plans to visit potential manufacturing sites in Phoenix, Arizona during the visit.

“Without UKTI’s guidance, finding the information we needed to set up in the US would have been like looking for a needle in a haystack,” says Elizabeth. “UKTI’s support was like a springboard for us and our export business has taken off as a result. We have found that there is a real respect for British products in the US. I would tell any company that is thinking of exporting to give it a go. There is a lot of support out there for growing companies and it doesn’t cost nearly as much as you would think.”

The UK and the US

The UK and the US are each other’s single largest investors and most important partners in science and innovation. In fact, more than a quarter of new investment projects in the UK come from US investors, and bilateral trade between the UK and the US is worth around £120 billion per year.

In 2013, the US continued to strengthen its relationship with the UK, funding 501 projects and creating 32,488 new jobs. About a million people in the US work for British companies, while a further million in the UK work for American firms.

The US economy is integrated and largely self-contained, with every major industry represented. The sheer size of the US means it should be treated as a series of regional markets with varying characteristics.

For further information about business opportunities in the US, please go to www.gov.uk/ukti

Helping you to do business abroad

Doing business in another country can be a challenge, so it’s good to know that UK Trade & Investment is there to help you succeed.

Through a range of unique services, including participation at selected trade fairs, overseas missions and providing bespoke market intelligence, UK Trade & Investment can help you crack foreign markets and quickly get to grips with regulations and business practices overseas.

Through our Passport to Export programme we offer new and inexperienced exporters:

- Free capability assessments
- Support in visiting potential markets
- Mentoring from a local export professional
- Free action plans
- Customised and subsidised training
- Ongoing support once you’re up and running

UKTI was delighted to support Urban Front in its business overseas.



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