



***Paul McCairn, managing director of BriMac and MWTF board member, explains how he and his company first got involved in international trade.***

“Export,” they said. “It’s the only way.” But we didn’t have the first clue what to do!

That was mid 2001 – and my company was struggling to win new business in the UK. Specialising in the design and manufacture of quality bearing housings, our traditional UK market was shrinking fast with the demise of heavy engineering.

We had plenty to offer – a good product and an energetic workforce – but also an ever decreasing customer base. Where could we go for advice and support?

Then during a meeting with our accountant, up popped the ‘MWTF’ and before long we were at a breakfast meeting learning about ‘Doing Business in the Far East’. The idea of supplying the Far East at that time was a distant dream – but what we needed more than anything was to be in a room packed with similar like-minded business people who were all pretty much in the same boat – a product or service – who wanted to find the best way to new markets. Not only that, but sitting and talking with people with the same issues, meant we were not alone. That morning’s expense of £35 was money *very* well spent.

We returned to the office having listened intently to the case studies from companies that had done well (and also those who had made mistakes).

We needed a plan. A simple plan. We concentrated on the countries closer to home to keep transport costs to a minimum. This has now generated a very healthy European customer base – and the remarkable fact is that Germany is our best market – and yet for the time we had been in business, all that was ever drummed into us, was “You’ll never sell to the Germans – their engineering is the best....” Sorry, not the case.

After Europe, and with the help of UK Trade & Investment we looked to the Middle East, then further afield to Malaysia, Singapore

and Thailand. We have just penetrated the Brazilian market – and in recent weeks, picked up our first customer from Canada.

Since we started exporting we've not looked back. The MWTF helped raise our profile and, more importantly, the confidence of the business to make it realise that trading internationally is not difficult. We've made good use of UKTI's services along the way and, without doubt, turning our attention to export markets has saved our business.

We make sure our work-force gets involved in the "export thing". So much so that a large map of the world sits proudly on the notice board in the staff canteen. The staff are always kept up-to-date on our export activity and they take great pride in the orders they help to produce for THEIR overseas clients. The number of countries we now deal with are too many to mention. It's one big geography lesson!

I joined the MWTF board a few years ago as I decided to put something back in to the organisation, that had encouraged me to export in the first place. I am now Vice-Chair and do my best to convert others to the rewards and merits of exporting.

Just recently, I heard an interesting fact the those companies who export are those companies who have greater chance of withstanding a recession. We are proof of that – when it goes quiet in the UK – we continue to move forward with numerous overseas orders – small and large – which supplement our UK turnover when times get hard.

What we have also found is that trading internationally raises your company's profile at every turn. Even our UK customers know where we are heading next, and what export orders we have won. It gives us great credibility.

Like many journeys, there are pitfalls along the way – and there are many things we would have done differently – but without those experiences, we would not be as strong as we are today. The MWTF is great when you need quick advice from "real life" exporters who have first hand experience of trading internationally.

So on that note, my one mission is to encourage all the small 'Bri-Macs' out there who may also be struggling like my company once was – and get among them and spread the word that West Midlands manufacturing, products and services can reach all corners of the globe. It won't break the bank and it's not difficult and it's real fun!