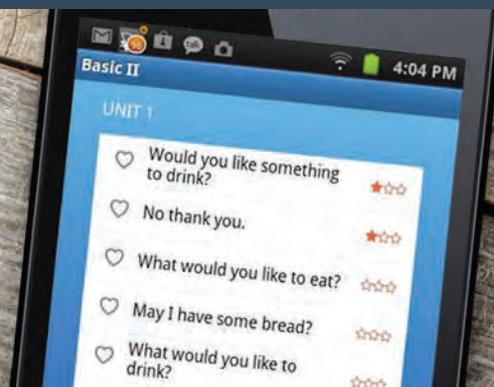


Success Story

Downloading New International Markets

Urban Planet Mobile

With the largest library of English language lessons available for mobile, we reach up to 85% of the world's English learning population.



The Company

Urban Planet Mobile specializes in “mobile education” software that teaches English audio lessons to users after they download it to their wireless device. The company started in 2008 and now has customers in 38 countries served by 26 employees. As such, the company is an outlier, since the majority of U.S. exporters export to only one international market. The company’s largest selling product is Urban English, and it also produces a writing product that helps people learn to write in English.

The Challenge

According to founder and CEO Brian Oliversmith, the company started in 2008. “That was a really tough time to start a company, because this little recession happened about 5 months later,” he recalled. Money was very tight and great care had to be taken when deciding where to spend on marketing and other business development strategies. From the beginning, the largest market for the product was outside the United States. How would Oliversmith find reliable

buyers without spending a fortune on travel and advertising?

The Solution

Oliversmith made the first investment in a flight to a conference at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, co-sponsored by the U.S. Commercial Service. At the conference, which takes place annually in the spring, he met senior U.S. Commercial Service officers from all over Asia, a region where he’d never been. He said: “With their help, I started to narrow down where we were going to first jump into the market, where we would start to spend our real resources. It was an amazing 3 days. I learned more in that conference than I could have learned in 2 years flying around on airplanes. Since then we now invest in those countries and are up and operational in many of them.”

Officers he met at the conference helped him find partners in Asian countries with high growth potential. “Before we knew it, we were in a wonderful university they found for us in Myanmar

(formerly Burma), and less than 9 months later we launched our product there.”

Total company profits generated from international sales are about 98 percent. Oliversmith said that Urban Planet Mobile is growing every year and creating new jobs.

Lessons Learned

Oliversmith contends that his company is better and stronger because of international exposure.

Importantly, he has diversified his staffing to reflect the need for cultural expertise. He said, “In our little team, we have people from Santiago, Chile, to Lithuania, to people who are from Russia and Korea, to people who have come from Japan. It gives us a global perspective. It’s very hard to do business worldwide from a very American-centric perspective.”

A second lesson is the importance of not waiting to export until your company achieves a certain size. “I would encourage people to start at an earlier stage to see what they can learn from the U.S. Commercial Service. Owners can learn a lot about where they should start without having to go to all these countries. Talk to them early on. Don’t wait.”

Third, he actively seeks out other companies in his area with complementary products and services that are not exporting. One such company has 400 employees. Oliversmith said, “They’ve started an

alliance with us and are seeing what demand is for some of their products in an external market, and I think it’s started to really open up their eyes to the opportunity they have internationally. What I tell people is there is a great big world out there that is very, very hungry for education products, especially American education products.”

Action

The U.S. Commercial Service sponsors or participates in a variety of national and international conferences that often feature business matchmaking. One of the annual events, TRADE WINDS (1.usa.gov/1Ai8GVb), takes place in different parts of the world deemed to have significant opportunities for U.S. small and medium-size businesses.

The conference referred to in the story on Urban Planet Mobile is the annual Asia Pacific Business Outlook Conference at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. The highlight is one-on-one counseling by Senior Commercial Officers—the heads of U.S. Commercial Service offices located within U.S. embassies and consulates—throughout Asia.

Lastly, you can attend regional Discover Global Markets export conferences that are also held on an annual basis and include matchmaking with international buyers. For more information, contact your local U.S. Commercial Service office.

A close-up photograph of a person wearing a grey business suit jacket, holding a black smartphone with both hands. The person's fingers are positioned as if they are about to tap the screen. The background is a blurred office or public space with greenery and architectural elements.

Urban English® is an award-winning English language learning program deliverable to any phone for anytime, anywhere learning.