

US Radar Inc.

Much has been written about Illinois' small manufacturing companies having difficulty competing in a global economy, but Decatur-based US Radar has decided that exporting can increase their sales, after receiving assistance from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

US Radar Inc. founded in 1984 by Keith Millard, produces and sells speed radar for law enforcement and sports uses. In 1995 Mr. Millard developed the "Phantom" line of speed radar, a hand held gun type of device for use in law enforcement situations, as well as a mobile unit to be placed in police cars, mounted to the dashboard. The speed radar products can gauge the speed of a motorist within one tenth of a mile per hour and are highly reliable and well priced.



Last year Jeff Paulsen, a long time family friend, was casually looking for a new business opportunity and asked Mr. Millard if he would ever be interested in selling his business. Thinking about retirement, Mr. Millard replied that he might, and several months later, Mr. Paulsen bought US Radar in February 2003. Prior to buying US Radar Mr. Paulsen was a real estate investor in Decatur.

Mr. Paulsen saw that there were several opportunities to expand sales. The company marketed their products to law enforcement departments through direct mail. Most of their sales come from police departments, campus security offices, sheriff's departments, homeowners associations, property managers and security companies that are concerned about speeding on their premises.

Mr. Paulsen hoped that outsourcing portions of the production process could speed up production of the radar units. An Illinois company was found for the outsourced production and capacity has increased by 50%. Now with more units to be sold, Mr. Paulsen began to investigate how to grow sales.

Soon after acquiring the company, Mr. Paulsen attended an exporting seminar held in Chicago organized by the North Business and Industrial Council (NORBIC), one of the 40 Small Business Development Centers around the state supported by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Upon his return home, Mr. Paulsen contacted the nearby Bradley University Small Business Development Center and asked John Kolmer, the NAFTA Opportunity Center representative for assistance.

The Bradley NAFTA Opportunity Center developed extensive market research materials for US Radar that identified that the market in the United States for hand held radars was saturated but there was potential for growth in exporting. Mr. Paulsen said the market research was “invaluable.” As a result of the market research, the NAFTA Opportunity Center recruited US Radar to participate in the Illinois Trade Office’s Target Canada program.

The Target Canada program, sponsored by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity’s International Trade Office, organized US Radar’s participation in a trade show there. Mr. Paulsen brought his products and spent the three days learning about the market for speed radar in Canada and meeting with potential buyers.

In May 2003 US Radar was invited back to Canada to interview two potential distributors. Mr. Paulsen says that his experience with both Jeff Johnson and Denise Scott, the Illinois Trade Representatives in Toronto was “excellent. They arranged all the hotels, meals and transportation for my visit, and set up appointments with potential distributors. They also provided extensive customer outlines identifying strengths and weaknesses for each company I planned to meet.” As a result of this visit, US Radar is now negotiating with two companies for possible distribution agreements for Canada.

The assistance received from the Small Business Development Center has also fundamentally changed Mr. Paulsen’s approach to growing his company. Mr. Paulsen is now considering identifying a distributor in this country, especially in California, to provide similar services.

Currently making the transition from being a full time real estate investor to spending more time at US Radar, Mr. Paulsen’s goal was to double sales by the end of his first year of ownership. He has not quite reached his goal, but there are still two months left in his fiscal year.

The Bradley University Small Business Development Center is a member of the Illinois Small Business Development Center Network, working in partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity’s Small Business Development Center and the US Small Business Administration.