

# BUSINESSES without Borders

By Justin Campfield

ORLANDO-AREA COMPANIES USE EXPORTING TO GROW MARKETS AND INCREASE REVENUE.



»» For companies seeking increased revenue and expanded markets, exporting offers both panacea and panic.

After all, more consumers live outside of the United States than within them, and the potential of the global market is huge. Last year U.S. companies exported more than \$1 trillion worth of goods overseas, and in the metro-Orlando region alone exports totaled more than \$3 billion. Those numbers are enough to make any CEO sit up and take notice.

However, with those potential revenues comes risk as well. For every new market a company would like to penetrate, a labyrinth of regulations, local customs and competitors awaits. Exporting is not for the faint of heart.

But with local exports increasing annually at double-digit rates and numerous area business organizations working to make exporting easier than ever, it is a risk that many companies find worth taking. Four local companies in particular are reaping the rewards that await.



**Mitchel J. Laskey, president and CEO of Brijot Imaging Systems**

## BRIJOT IMAGING SYSTEMS

In the aftermath of 9/11, a seismic shift took place in the security industry. Suddenly, the old way of screening for threats at airports, as well as at other potential terrorist targets, seemed tragically outdated.

Among the companies responding with innovative technological solutions was Brijot Imaging Systems. Formed in 2004, the Lake Mary-based company got its start by commercializing millimeter wave imaging technology developed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency — better known by its acronym DARPA — the Department of Justice and Lockheed Martin.

Under Brijot Imaging Systems, the technology became the world's first surveillance system to feature full-motion, real-time millimeter wave imaging capabilities. This advance offered a dramatically different way to scan people at secured areas, such as airports, by searching for contraband by "seeing" through would-be perpetrators' clothing.

While the product's technology was working as planned, the company's distribution plan needed an overhaul.

"Initially the primary target was the U.S. government," says Mitchel Laskey, Brijot Imaging Systems' president and CEO. "But we've found that the global community has adopted these technologies earlier than the U.S. because of regulatory and other issues."

Once it decided to wholeheartedly pursue exporting as a growth strategy, Brijot Imaging Systems sought the assistance of the Orlando U.S. Exports Assistance Center. The center played a key role in the company's future exporting success by helping it investigate markets, evaluate potential partners and execute product launches.

As a result, Brijot Imaging Systems' products can now be found at airports, government buildings and critical infrastructure installations in more than 15 countries, including major markets such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Russia, Japan, and China. This year, exports are on track to generate between \$5 million and \$10 million for

the company, which is more than half of its total revenue.

"Like most small companies, you chase the money, so wherever the opportunities are, that is where we go," says Laskey.

## MULTICOM

For Multicom's founder and president Sherman Miller, the road to successful exporting began more than a decade ago with a series of Saturday morning "How to Export" classes conducted by the Small Business Development Center at the University of Central Florida.

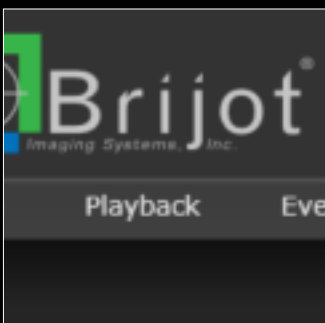
Miller, whose company distributes technical products used in the cable television, satellite, traffic signal, VoIP, fiber-optic and security industries, says that it was about that time that he felt the business environment shifting under his feet and that knew he needed to adapt.

"You have to think about your business and reinvent yourself all the time," says Miller, who started Multicom out of his garage in 1982. "The technology keeps changing and evolving and you have to keep up with it all the time. I started thinking about exporting and I thought, 'I'd like to but I don't know anything about it, where do I start?' I forced myself to go to those Saturday morning classes and, while it was daunting at first, I said 'you know, I can learn this, I just have to spend time working on it.'"

Now a seasoned exporting expert, Miller and his Longwood-based company distributes 13,000 products — such as antennas, cables, switches, modulators, receivers, and transmitters — to 25 countries, most of them in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Multicom is one of thousands of

**By harnessing cutting-edge passive millimeter wave technology, Brijot Imaging Systems' products can "see" through clothing to identify potentially dangerous items, such as guns and explosives.**





COURTESY MULTICOM

**Longwood-based Multicom distributes products including receivers and transmitters to 25 countries for use in the cable television, fiber-optic and security industries.**

Florida companies that are using [www.FloridaExportDirectory.com](http://www.FloridaExportDirectory.com), an online initiative of Enterprise Florida that connects overseas buyers with Florida providers.

While the U.S. market is still Multicom's biggest revenue generator, bringing in about 75 percent of the company's business, exporting is an integral part of Multicom's success because of the purchasing power it provides the company.

"It's an important 25 percent because it helps us on our volume purchases, which helps the whole company," says Miller.

## GENICON

Gary Haberland credits exporting for the growth of Genicon, the surgical instrument manufacturer he started in 1998. As Haberland puts it, exports "were the wind that filled our sails."

Like Multicom, those sails were first unfurled in the garage of the founder's home. Today, Genicon occupies a 10,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art medical equipment manufacturing and distribution building. The Winter Park facility is where medical instruments used for minimally invasive surgery, with a special focus on laparoscopic procedures, are researched, designed and manufactured before making their way to 44 countries around the world.

To hear Haberland tell it, without exports, which generate 85 percent of

the company's revenue, Genicon may not be in business today. And if it were, it certainly wouldn't look like it does today.

"Exports were the way that the open markets accepted our products," says Haberland. "At the time we started there were a lot of major firms blocking out the smaller ones. We found that internationally there was a more level playing field. So that is where we put our efforts."

In addition, Haberland says that two other advantages unique to Orlando gave his company a leg up on the export business. One, he says, is that it's easier to break into foreign markets

when hailing from an internationally known city.

"I don't have to point out Orlando on the map," explains Haberland, who adds that local tourism attractions and good weather make it easy for his company to convince distributors to attend the training sessions they host at their headquarters. "If we were from Peoria, Ill., I don't think people would know where that is."

And second, Orlando's transportation infrastructure gives him easy access to foreign markets. He says that the recently expanded FedEx logistics center at Orlando International Airport has helped a lot, as has being close to the ports of Tampa and Miami. Having a world-class airport in town doesn't hurt either.

"Something we take for granted that not everyone has is a major airport hub to get in and out of," says Haberland.

## NR ELECTRONICS

NR Electronics has been very successful exporting; they even have an award to show for it.

The University of Central Florida Technology Incubator tenant, which won the U.S. Department of Commerce's Export Achievement Award in 2006, procures and distributes obsolete and hard-to-find electronic components to numerous countries. Since



COURTESY GENICON

**Genicon's patented laparoscopic surgery instruments are manufactured in Winter Park and distributed to 44 countries around the globe.**



**Liza Ordonez-Ruiz and her husband Norberto Ruiz founded NR Electronics.**

its founding in 2003, the company has grown to a \$2 million-a-year business through exports to Europe, Asia, South and Central America.

With its principals, Liza Ordonez-Ruiz and her husband, Norberto Ruiz, both immigrants to the U.S., NR Electronics is a great example of what Orlando U.S. Export Assistance Center Director Kenneth Mouradian calls one of Orlando's greatest exporting advantages: the people who live and migrate here.

"The region has a lot of people living in it that are grossly aware of the rest of the world," said Mouradian. "That may not be the case in Idaho or Montana. What that does is open people's eyes to opportunities overseas. And a lot of non-native English speakers and immigrants are already risk takers, so entering new markets doesn't seem as scary to them."

NR Electronics began by targeting Spain, where Norberto had extensive contacts from his days as a professional jai lai player.

"You have to have basic cultural knowledge and that is one thing we already had on our side," says Ordonez-Ruiz, NR Electronics' managing director. "Through those initial relationships we were able to generate other contacts in France, Germany and then many other countries."

While the company originally was an export-only business, it is now using

what it learned in Europe to enter the U.S. market as well.

"In terms of product quality, Europe has been light years ahead of the United States," says Ordonez-Ruiz. "Getting our product offerings right for the European market has led us through a maturation process that is positioning us to do well in the U.S. The expertise we required through exporting has made it a piece of cake to now do that here in this country."

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

While exporting has benefited the bottom lines of Brijot Imaging Systems, Genicon, Multicom, and NR Electronics, their success and that of other Orlando-area exporters also greatly impacts the area's overall economy.


Brijot Imaging Systems is a good example of the ripple effect created by a strong export sector. Of the more than 2,000 parts that are used to produce its flagship product, the GEN 2 full-motion, real-time millimeter wave imaging screener, company CEO Laskey says that about 80 percent come from local companies.

"Most of our supply chain is in the Orlando area, so we are a job creator," says Laskey. "Our suppliers become indirect exporters themselves."

Genicon's CEO Haberland also agrees that exporting has an exponential effect on the economy.

"Any company that exports, especially those that export manufactured goods, the force multiplier on the economy has a positive impact," says Haberland. "Our supply purchases and things like payroll, shipping, fuel, electricity — that all touches several different companies within the local economy."

NR Electronics has even convinced a couple of European companies to set up shop in the region.

"We've always told our partners in Europe how great it is to do business here," says Ordonez-Ruiz. "And as a result we've had a few of them come here and start businesses, which obviously is great for our economy." 

## EXPORT ASSISTANCE

The economic impact of exporting is exactly why a number of influential local business- and development-oriented organizations have made it a priority to help potential exporters get started.

"The more companies that export from Metro Orlando, the greater positive economic impact is made on our region," says Carmenza Gonzalez, vice president of international business development at the Metro Orlando EDC. "This leads to increased sales for the company that is exporting and more jobs for the community."

Organizations that provide assistance, including the EDC, Orlando U.S. Export Assistance Center, Enterprise Florida, Disney Entrepreneur Center, Small Business Development Center at UCF and others, specialize in helping companies adapt their products and the way they do business in order to fit the markets they wish to enter.

"We help companies learn about the market they are interested in selling their products in, identify which countries they should be targeting, and help them learn about the country and culture to avoid mistakes," says Gonzalez. "We also help them make contacts, learn about the dos and don'ts when doing business abroad, and how to navigate rules, regulations and local customs for doing business in that country."

The most important thing for would-be exporters to know, says Mouradian, is that if a company needs exporting help, they can find it in Orlando.

"I encourage everyone to look at the range of services available to them," he says. "Help is out there."

For exporting counsel, call the Metro Orlando EDC's International Business Development team at 407.422.7159 or e-mail [contactus@OrlandoEDC.com](mailto:contactus@OrlandoEDC.com).

