

Case Study: How to successfully enter the UK market

The Situation

Canadian enterprise software company, 360 Innovations (360i), wanted to gain entry to the UK market. They began investigating opportunities in 2014, but quickly discovered that there was significant local competition which had already achieved a strong position within their potential customer base.

The market segment which 360 Innovations addresses is a relatively niche one - Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software for the custom manufactured products industry, especially manufacturers of windows and doors. The company, whilst relatively well-known in the countries in which it operates, Canada, USA, Mexico and France, was unknown in the UK prior to 2014. The UK window and door manufacturing market is divided amongst a few very large manufacturers with several hundred million revenues, a number of mid-size companies and a relatively large number of quite small companies. The primary target market for 360i is companies with a turnover of £10m-100m.

During 2014, 360i endeavoured to make UK contacts and meetings with potential clients with very limited results. As a result, 360i approached CanadaUK Partners for support with determining the size of the UK market, the local competition and their product weaknesses and to identify a means to showcase 360i's product strengths and engage with potential customers.

This case study will show how CanadaUK Partners worked with 360i from July 2014 until their successful UK public launch at a major industry trade show in April 2016.

The Challenge

The primary challenge was that most potential clients had already invested substantial sums in competitive software products, often over a period of many years, so convincing them to change to an unknown, overseas software company would not be a simple sales task. Addressing this challenge from Canada without staff that had previous experience of the UK market would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible. Added to that, the company is based in Quebec and most of the company's staff are Francophones, whose first language is French not English.

The importance of the language issue can often be overlooked, especially by English speakers who assume that as we all nominally speak the same language, there is no need to adapt North American English for the UK market. However, there are subtle differences which can be especially important where technical terms are in use, as with the window and door industry. If marketing materials were originally written in French and translated into North American English, the scope for misunderstanding is increased. Having marketing materials in recognisably 'UK English' enhances their readability and provides reassurance to a potential UK client that the overseas company understands the local nuances and better understands the needs of the UK market.

In many technology companies, marketing tends to be a low priority and 360i, like many similar companies, is driven first and foremost by the engineering behind the product suite. As a result there was a certain amount of education involved in convincing them that marketing was equally as important as engineering in convincing the customer to buy.

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The final challenge for a company based in Canada is the time difference with the UK. In 360i's case, this is five hours behind, meaning that more than half the UK working day has elapsed before normal Canadian office hours begin, making it difficult to reach people by phone. This was particularly important in the final stages of organising the exhibition stand when liaison would be required with multiple parties in the UK.

The Solution

We identified that our first task was to raise the profile of 360i in the UK to ensure that any potential customer would at least have heard of them and have some idea of their general capabilities. We then reviewed what UK trade events their potential customers were likely to attend and quickly concluded that the Fabricator Installer Trade (FIT) show to be held in Telford in April 2016, would be an ideal showcase for 360i's capabilities. On our client's behalf we were able to secure one of the last stands at the FIT show and began the process of identifying various touch points between the project start and the date of the event. These included a brochure mailing, tele-marketing follow-up, mailing of VIP and standard tickets and then a final email to remind prospects of the FIT show and to come and meet 360i on the stand.

We liaised directly with the FIT show organisers, securing the last stand in the main hall and they were happy to provide additional publicity for 360i, both for securing the last stand and being an overseas exhibitor, their first from Canada. One of the show highlights is the Gala Dinner at which various awards are presented in front of an audience of 900. We encouraged 360i to sign up as it provided an excellent informal networking opportunity with their target audience. Fortunately, although they were too late to book seats originally, we were able to place them at the top of the waiting list and secure four places from a subsequent cancellation.

In order to reach out to the potential UK customer base in advance of the FIT show, we researched which industry databases were available to supplement the limited data that 360i had been able to collect, and identified an ideal data source to undertake a direct marketing campaign. Having secured the database, we refined it by researching each company's size to identify our primary targets by turnover.

Our next step was to review 360i's UK web site design and to recommend changes of terminology in parallel with designing and creating a UK brochure. In discussions with our designer, we identified that using the red maple leaf as a core motif (see figure 1), acknowledging the company's nationality, was likely to be seen in very positive terms by the target audience and help make the brochure memorable. Further innovative creative work resulted in a two-thirds A4 brochure, with striking interleaved solid red pages between the text pages, allowing some text to be revealed and some to be hidden until the page was turned. In addition, a maple leaf cut-out was used on the cover and the extracted red maple leaf printed up as an undated invitation for future use, thus saving on future print costs.

Whilst recommending changes to the UK web site and designing the UK brochure, it became clear that it was desirable for 360i to publish a UK phone number in addition to UK postal and email addresses. We researched and organised a UK telephone number and voicemail service and initially handled all calls before handing over the management to our client upon completion of the project.

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A further strand of the direct marketing was to create a dedicated 360i UK Twitter feed and follow as many of the industry players as possible and generate regular interesting news about 360i's capabilities. Tweets were scheduled for a minimum of twice daily and the UK web site news was



Figure 1 - the 360i UK Brochure

updated monthly to demonstrate commitment to the UK market.

Once the web site changes, UK telephone number and brochure printing were underway we created a direct mail letter to accompany the brochure, introducing 360i and announcing they would be exhibiting at the FIT show and inviting recipients to contact us for more information. This was followed up by a tele-marketing campaign seeking to confirm receipt of the brochure, intentions to attend the FIT show and inviting recipients to arrange a one to one appointment at FIT or a telephone discussion if they couldn't attend. As a result of this follow-up we were able to identify a number of strong sales leads for 360i to follow-up and fix appointments at FIT, which they did.

To support the direct mail, we researched the specialist UK window and door press to review the advertising possibilities for the most widely read window and door industry publications, within our target criteria, especially those who were planning special features on the show. In the end the client opted not to use any publication advertising, other than a small advertisement in the official show guide. When designing the show guide advertisement, we ensured that there was a consistency of information and thought about how the company was promoted and aligned with their key objectives which had been incorporated into the UK brochure, web site and FIT stand.

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Our graphic designer for the brochure followed through the maple leaf motif and other graphic elements from the brochure in the design of 360i's 'dressed' shell scheme stand. We concluded that the basic shell scheme design would not convey a strong enough message about the quality and sophistication of 360i's product and it would be necessary to incorporate strong design elements to highlight brand recognition. These elements were reflected in the the four different areas of window and door manufacturing and selling processes which their software addresses. We used the same colour coding as the web site and brochure to highlight these different aspects of the software's capabilities. Creating a suitable design within a 22.5 square metre shell incorporating four different areas, storage and a reception desk was challenging, but proved very effective as can be seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2 - 360i Dressed Shell Scheme Stand

Figure 2 shows the main features of the stand, which enabled demonstrations of different elements of their software on separate screens in colour coded areas, as well as showing a corporate video on the two outward facing screens to attract attention. Preparation of the FIT stand and attendance at the show involved substantial work in completing various forms and liaising between the client, the stand designer and builder over the furniture, electrical, multimedia and visitor data capture requirements.

The client decided fairly late in the project to commission a limited number of promotional mobile phone top-up batteries to distribute to key visitors to their stand and we provided liaison with the UK-based supplier and took delivery of the products which we transported to the show together with the UK brochures.

We attended the stand build at the show with the designer, to ensure that everything was completed to plan and also to deliver brochures and the promotional items, so that the stand was fully ready for operation when 360i's staff arrived on site at the beginning of the show.

Project Team

CanadaUK Partners recognized at the outset that in order to complete the project successfully we would need to recruit external expertise covering a number of disciplines. We assembled a team who all brought exceptional specialist skills, worked very well as a team and contributed greatly to the success of the project. As far as the client, 360i was concerned, they were dealing with one

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organisation and all the different aspects of the project were brought together seamlessly by CanadaUK Partners.

George Edwards, Managing Director CanadaUK Partners – Project Manager. With over thirty-five years' experience helping Canadian companies enter the UK market George was well-equipped to oversee the management of the project as well as bringing extensive research and industry expertise to bear.

Alison Page MCIM Chartered Marketer, Associate CanadaUK Partners and Founder Alison Page Marketing – marketing strategy. Alison founded her marketing consultancy business in 2009 and successfully delivers sound marketing strategies and campaigns for her clients along with creative management services. Alison previously worked in the motor industry, with experience in sales and marketing, event management, finance and account management giving her multi-level skills and a solid commercial background. Her insights were invaluable in delivering a marketing plan which was ambitious, but realistic, firmly rooted in many years' hands-on experience.

Kate Marston, KM Design – graphic design. Kate established her graphic design agency more than ten years ago and since its inception the company has amassed a loyal and diverse client base, ranging from start-ups and SMEs through to large UK wide and international companies. Kate's contribution was immense in designing a memorable brochure, mailing piece, advertisement for the FIT catalogue and the graphic panels for the FIT stand, whilst establishing a strong brand identity. Kate was the winner of the Business Services category in The Best Business Women Awards 2015.

Tracey Doran, Doran Design – 3D design of the FIT stand. Doran Design is an award-winning design consultancy specialising in both 3D and 2D design, started in the early 1990's by Tracey Doran after nearly 20 years in the industry. Tracey had previously worked with both Alison and Kate and was therefore a natural choice to produce the impressive but practical 3D design of the shell scheme.

Natalie Reid-Hughes, Communique Associates – tele-marketing campaign. Communique Associates is a small boutique telemarketing and sales training agency with twenty years' experience, working with many different sized businesses across a wide range of industries. Alison had previously worked with Natalie and knew that her team could produce the type of results we needed to ensure our marketing campaign maximised its potential.

Aiver Contracts Ltd – Stand builder. Recommended by Tracey Doran, based on many years' experience, Aiver was founded in 1984 as a full service contractor with the aim of designing and constructing purpose made exhibition stands, conference sets and promotional events, plus interior displays for museums, offices, galleries and shops.

Results

The use of the industry database we purchased on behalf of the client proved invaluable in identifying the key target companies and contacts and provided the details for our mailing of the UK brochure and follow-up emails.

The tele-marketing undertaken following the mailing served to identify any changes in contacts' details, confirm that the brochure had been received and whether the contact or company was

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attending the FIT show. It was also a critical touchpoint in the marketing strategy and a means to assist development of a new relationship. Additionally, as a direct result of this exercise, we were able to provide over forty follow-up personalised actions for 360i by phone and email. We were also able to confirm a number of appointments for the show, including one of the largest manufacturers in the UK, as well as identify one prospect which wouldn't be attending the FIT show but could be contacted separately. Much incidental intelligence was gained as well, including the fact that the brochure had received the desired positive impact by recipients. A fully detailed analysis of the tele-marketing databases was supplied to the client for future follow-up, which will prove invaluable to them as they progress their UK objectives.

The development of the UK Twitter feed generated re-tweets by the show organisers and others in the industry thus raising the profile of 360i before the show and helping to ensure most visitors would have heard of 360i by the end of the show, if not before.

When the client saw the completed stand they were delighted with the quality of the finish and the facilities that we had been able to provide in a limited space, and it drew positive reactions from all who saw it, comparing very favourably with other shell scheme designs at the show.

The client was extremely happy with the overall results from the show and the work which preceded it, stating that they had received over fifty serious enquiries at their stand and had been kept busy throughout the show. In addition they met another software developer at the show whose product is a natural complement to 360i's existing capabilities and would greatly enhance the attractiveness of both companies' products in the UK and elsewhere. Further discussions are planned to identify the steps needed to provide full integration of the two products.

Stéphane Mondoux, CEO of 360 Innovations said, "Since day one, our introduction to the UK market has been an amazing journey. We reached an incredible milestone by being the runner-up of FIT Show Awards in the Best Creative Shell Scheme Stand and finished in the top 3 in front of all these companies. I was really proud to see our company name in front of 900 people at the Gala Dinner! Everything went beyond our expectations and I can affirm there is a place for our solutions in the UK market."

Conclusions

These results were made possible by all the advance marketing and planning for FIT with the client. Good results don't happen by accident, they require careful planning and marketing over many months by a dedicated team of experienced experts. It can never be assumed that because you have the best product or service, that customers will automatically beat a path to your door; they need to be informed about your capabilities over a period of time using different media to allow relationships to develop. Credibility can be gained by exhibiting at key events attended by the leading industry players.

It is important to take into account subtle local language and terminology differences and provide local contact points to make it as easy as possible for potential customers to reach you and provide them with the confidence that you are prepared to invest in understanding their market before trying to sell to them.

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Engaging the services of a UK company like CanadaUK Partners to assist with your UK market development will greatly reduce the risk, lower the cost and shorten the time to market. Contact us today for a no obligation discussion about how we can help you:

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<https://vimeo.com/163156580> (video showing the build of the FIT stand)