



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Sonya Kostadinova



Owner, President and CEO
Transcon Trading Co., Inc.
Columbia, South Carolina
SBEA/NSBA Member since 1992

Congressional Representatives

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.)
Sen. Tim Scott (R-S.C.)
Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C., Dis. 2)

Tell us about your company.

Transcon Trading Co., Inc. is an Export Management Company (EMC), located in Columbia, South Carolina that has been in business since 1979. The company's mission is to help U.S. manufactures open international markets via exporting; as well as assist international customers import and build brand awareness and distribution networks for U.S. made products. Essentially, Transcon performs the functions of an export department for those small U.S. manufacturers that do not have the expertise to establish their own in-house export department, or simply opt to supplement their export efforts by tapping into Transcon's already established distribution networks overseas.

Internationally, Transcon represents a number of U.S. manufacturers from several different industries and has its own company, Mr. Groom Pet Products, one of the oldest and most-respected professional grooming, cosmetic, and health care line, which is sold both domestically and internationally to groomers, pet shops, and consumers.

What is the toughest challenge facing your business right now?

Regulatory and registration requirements in many countries effectively serve as non-trade barriers to entry helping protectionism to proliferate.

What types of federal support for exporting are most useful?

The Export-Import Bank of the U.S. (Ex-Im Bank) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service's Marketing Assistance Program.

How many years have you been exporting and how has trade boosted your job/sales growth and global competitiveness?

I have been involved in international business, trade, and exporting all my life, and have been sharing my knowledge and experience by teaching at the top U.S. international business program at the Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina. No one can be competitive if they do not understand the customers. We do and we help U.S. manufactures understand them and succeed.

How has your company benefitted from preferential treatment under bilateral/multilateral free trade agreements?

Not as much as we would have liked simply because of the regulatory burden imposed by some importing countries for some products that fall into agricultural categories. Impossible or simply long, exhausting, and expensive registrations often are used as a protectionist tool, and effectively serve as barriers to entry.

What has been your biggest success as an exporting business?

Transcon has helped put on the world map U.S. branded products from several industries including personal hair care, equine performance, pet care and pet food products. Some of the best equine hospitals, trainers and vets have been able to use our equine and pet products, and some of the largest chain stores have been able to offer their international consumers our U.S. made personal care products.

Have you utilized any financing programs from Ex-Im Bank or other federal agencies? If so, how did they help your business?

Yes, the USDA Marketing Assistance Program was instrumental as we would not have been able to open so many markets without it. Also, Ex-Im Bank's Discretionary Credit Limit (DCL) and Special Buyer Credit Limit (SBCL) both have helped mitigate the financial risk as we provide credit terms to our international customers. Also, in 2012, I [testified](#) before the Senate Banking Committee on the importance of Ex-Im Bank.

What is the best exporting advice you can offer?

Choose your customers carefully and do your market intelligence. Do not rush to sell your products to just anybody because there are so many ways you can get hurt. On the exporter side, someone else will file for export clearance of your products, but if there is misinformation, the Customs and Border Protection will chase you, not the buyer. On the importer side, watch for your intellectual property rights and other possible protections or lack thereof, as in some countries no one else may be able to import your product but this one buyer, and what if they are just blocking your entry or, if they are diverting product.

