

CMHC INTERNATIONAL



CMHC Support Lends Air of Confidence to Established Housing Exporter

Developing a solid reputation for superior Canadian building methods and products internationally helps housing companies to expand their export activities and their businesses. It's just one tool Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), the federal housing agency, has to support Canadian housing companies in markets around the world.

But giving Canadian companies an edge in the export market involves much more than a promotional program. Ontario Trade Consultant, Ken DeWolf will tell you CMHC's assistance to housing companies has undergone some changes. "Our support has become much more tailored these days," he says. "We are moving away from the big trade mission and looking at ways to strengthen relationships between Canadian companies and potential buyers."

One company that has benefited from this tailored approach is DAC International Inc., an Ottawa area company that designs, builds and exports



energy efficient homes and housing products. Already established in Japan, the UK and Ireland, DAC was not looking to CMHC for help to break into the export market. Where CMHC saw an opportunity to assist was in garnering acceptance and trust for Canadian wood-frame construction while introducing DAC to potential new clients.

Super E

Super E™ is a new housing standard developed by Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) that builds on the highly successful R-2000 and Advanced Houses programs. It utilizes state of the art construction techniques that promote energy conservation, environmentally responsible construction and healthy

housing. Opportunities for companies offering this type of energy-efficient housing have increased significantly since the signing of the Kyoto Accord in the UK, Japan and other key export markets. And the emphasis on housing quality and the need to improve energy efficiency in order to reduce carbon emissions will only continue to grow over time. New building codes in the UK for example now require high levels of insulation – something that's very difficult to achieve using traditional British brick and block construction.

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“The solution is to build Canadian-style wood-frame houses,” says DeWolf. “The British began experimenting with energy-efficient housing, but were stumbling over the same problems we encountered 30 years ago. We have been well accepted in the market because builders realize we can save them time and money as they wrestle with their new code requirements.”

Since DAC has been a key supplier of Super E housing to Japan and is one of the most experienced suppliers of this type of housing, CMHC and NRCan chose them to build one of the first demonstration houses in the UK. As a result of these and other similar demonstration projects the Canadian method of construction is gaining rapid acceptance by the warranty companies in the UK that provide coverage for all new homes.

Confidence boost

Jeff Armstrong, President of DAC, says his company appreciates the “clout” their association with CMHC brings to them. “When CMHC introduces us to a potential client as one of their best companies, that brings a tremendous amount of credibility to our company. Clients are not just hearing how great we think we are, but they’re hearing it from a respected agency of the federal government. We couldn’t have a better endorsement.”

This kind of support, along with help from the Canadian Embassy and Consulate staff, has helped DAC develop a strong presence in Japan. “CMHC and NRCan have helped us to identify new clients and business opportunities in this difficult market,” says Armstrong. “Our recent success with seniors housing is a direct result of these efforts on our behalf.”

Above and beyond

But Armstrong says CMHC’s support has gone well beyond matchmaking and promotion in Japan. When DAC got involved in building seniors residences their clients were not only interested in the construction of the buildings, they were looking for information and guidance on how to operate these facilities. DAC invited their clients to fly over and visit some of Canada’s best seniors facilities and immediately contacted CMHC to help them set up the visit. “When the Japanese delegation arrived CMHC had taken care of everything. The Vancouver and Toronto offices set up tours of innovative projects and arranged to have industry experts available to answer their questions. This kind of service provides a powerful incentive to deal with Canadian companies like ours,” he says. Armstrong expects their business in Japan to continue to flourish citing another recent introduction by CMHC’s Vancouver office to a potential client for a seniors residence project in Nagoya.

DAC’s partnership with CMHC has been strengthened further through Armstrong’s participation as a member of CMHC’s International Training Team, a group of housing experts responsible for promoting Canadian housing technology in export markets. The team is made up of people who not only have technical know how but also have practical experience in export markets.

DeWolf notes this type of activity has a direct benefit to DAC International and other Canadian housing exporters by raising the profile of Canada as a reliable source for imported building products. Armstrong

agrees that the work CMHC does enhances our industry's profile but adds that the local market intelligence gathered by speaking with rooms full of builders is invaluable too.

CMHC's work to help cement the relationships between DAC and its clients, is an indication, Armstrong says, that his company's relationship with CMHC is rock solid. The ability to call upon CMHC for support gives us a distinct advantage over our competitors from other countries. "CMHC deals with us and other Canadian companies as valued clients. In the business of housing export, with all its attendant risk and uncertainty, it's comforting to know we have the backing of our federal housing agency."

Canada Mortgage and Housing International: www.cmhc.ca/international

DAC International Inc.: www.dac.ca