

## Relationship Marketing in a Strange Land

By Lloyd D. Lemons, Jr.

Even the savviest global marketers often take a deep breath before attempting to do business in the former Soviet Union. For Dr. James E. Wright, V.P. of R&D at Troy Biosciences, Inc. (TBI), of Phoenix Arizona, the entry into Turkmenistan was a combination of serious business flavored with the Turkoman's homespun hospitality.

Seated around a large iron cauldron in the center of a smoke-filled wooden hut, and eating soup made from a mutton base, James Wright didn't have much opportunity to reflect on the adventure inherent in his mission. He and his associates from TBI, Executive V.P., Gayle Kennedy, and Daryl Smith, CEO of Troy Corporation, the parent company, were too busy toasting their guests, the president of Turkmenistan and several cabinet ministers.

Turkmenistan's cotton crops were being devastated by whiteflies that had become insecticide resistant. TBI, had already created a solution for just such a problem: Naturalis®, a biological formulation for broad-spectrum insect control, which was developing a worldwide reputation for killing whiteflies on cotton. In a visit to TBI headquarters in 1992, experts from the ministry of agriculture in Turkmenistan expressed an interest in the product and invited TBI to prove its worth in their homeland.

"They grow the majority of their foods in greenhouses in the wintertime", says Dr. Wright. "I traveled around the country with the growers and agricultural specialists, and worked with tomatoes and other products, while Mr. Smith had an audience with His Highness Saparmurat Turkmenbashi, the president."

Wright found the people of Turkmenistan to be hard working and very proud. "They showed us around. They were honored to have us as dinner guests. We sat around a big table, exchanged pleasantries, ate, drank, and toasted each other for three hours."

Entertainment aside, the trio had its work cut out. They shipped in Naturalis® from the manufacturing facility in Phoenix, and instructed the growers on how to use the product. They staged trials and product demonstrations, and held efficacy studies and seminars. They were obliged to prove it worked. They were also obliged to make arrangements for product registration; a tedious yet necessary step if the product was to be used legally in this Russian country. The presentation lasted ten days.

The ride home for these TBI executives was a long one. The buying decision was now in the hands of the Turkomans. This had been consultative selling to the nth degree, but the work paid off. In mid-1994 a substantial order was placed. In February 1995 another order was placed, one and a half times the size of the first, with the airlift scheduled for mid-March.

TBI discovered an unusual marketing strategy: combine biological pest control products with a generous measure of friendship and humility. Mix-in a large portion of value-added service, and make sure every promise is kept. Dr. Wright notes, "It's fundamentally a different system, but with patience and a little extra effort you can do business in a strange land."

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CAPTION 1: Dr. James E. Wright and Turkmenistan's agricultural officials examine cotton plants treated with TBI's biological insecticide.

CAPTION 2: Business negotiations and evening entertainment took place in smoke-filled wooden huts in the dead of winter.

#### AUTHOR'S BIO

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