

Trade officials to Md. businesses: think about increasing exports

By: Anamika Roy Anamika Roy July 12, 2016



A study by American Express and Dun & Bradstreet found that 5 percent of middle-market firms in the U.S. export goods or services. The Baltimore metro area and Maryland as a whole both fall just under that average, as do many states and major metro areas. (File)

Nearly 95 percent of the world's consumers live outside the United States, but less than 1 percent of American firms do any exporting, a gap that officials at the American Express Grow Global conference on Tuesday encouraged Maryland businesses to help fill.

Baltimore in its own right has several advantages as a midsized export hub with easy access to Interstate 95, a port and an airport. But when domestic markets are stable, it's easy to get lethargic and not think about expanding abroad, said Antwaun Griffin, deputy assistant secretary for U.S. operations at the International Trade Administration.



Antwaun Griffin, deputy assistant secretary for U.S. operations at the International Trade Administration. (Submitted photo)

"Baltimore is not unlike most American cities," said Griffin, with respect to its low percentage of exports compared to its overall number of middle-market firms.

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Of the state's 2,400-plus middle-market firms, only 3 percent export. In the Baltimore metro area, 4 percent of the region's nearly 1,200 middle-market firms export, the report found. In general, there is a perception among small and medium businesses that exporting is for bigger businesses. The report shows that 34 percent of businesses worth over \$1 billion export, compared to 5 percent of middle-market firms. However, middle-market firms make up 18 percent of firms that export overall.

Lawrence Brill, principle at Export Trade Consultants, LLC in Columbia, helps small and medium-sized businesses get the guidance they need to export.

"We are literally a hand-holding company for small and medium-sized businesses," he said Tuesday.

All a business needs to be able to export is a quality product that meets international standards and the ability to be cost competitive and to attract a partner in the foreign market.

"If you have the right product and the right company, the export opportunities are there," said Brill, who is also a member of the new Baltimore chapter of the Global Chamber, a chamber of commerce focused on trade.

DAP Products Inc., a large Baltimore company that makes construction chemicals, ships its products to distributors and big box stores in more than 70 countries. For DAP, being near the port is a big resource.

"For us, the Baltimore area works," said Bill Marsheck, international sales manager at DAP.

American Express Grow Global holds a range of events across the country for companies looking to expand internationally. Program officials decided to hold an event in Baltimore because of the city's exporting opportunities.

"It's a market where people talk about exports," said Ed Marsh, exporting adviser to American Express.

At Tuesday's conference at the Four Seasons Baltimore, several hundred exporters and small-business owners got to network and swap advice on how to export, while others were on the hunt for potential clients.

Brian Hubbard, president of Evolved Cyber Solutions in Ellicott City, was interested in meeting companies that are exporting and are looking for a company to navigate

cybersecurity and privacy laws in other countries. Many of those nations, such as Germany and the United Kingdom, have laws that are stricter than those in the U.S. when it comes to protecting customer data.

Kay Neseem, an occupational therapist and founder of Kay Kare, LLC, makes arm braces that wrap around the user's waist instead of his neck, so it's more comfortable and stable. Her company makes the braces in Virginia and Neseem is ready to take her products abroad. She also attended an American Express conference in Washington last month to learn more about export opportunities.

"Instead of trying to go to market, the market comes to you," she said. Neseem is going to Morocco later this year with the Department of Commerce and plans to do trade shows in Dubai to break into the Middle East.