

International Flavoring

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The series of articles "Before I Forget" published in *Perfumer & Flavorist* resulted in a number of letters from overseas. Some of the writers suggested a consulting arrangement in which I would offer flavor formulations of interest to them. Partly prompted by a desire to remain retired, but mostly by the conviction that the purchase of formulations is a waste of money, I explained to each potential client that although general flavor information exchange could be of value, unless one had the in-house ability to adapt that information to the customer's product and to specific country or area tastes, the information is useless.

I have remained somewhat abreast in our flavor technology by a number of overseas volunteer projects sponsored by the International Executive Service Corp (IESC). This private organization sends retired volunteers with specific know-how to third world countries requesting help in a particular discipline. The volunteer receives no pay but travels comfortably with spouse, stays at very good facilities and receives an adequate per diem for meals and normal daily needs. It offers a wonderful opportunity for the volunteers to see foreign lands, get to know the people, and erase the image of the "Ugly American."

The first assignment was in Egypt. Here the son of the owner of an Egyptian company that grew and processed spices decided to expand into flavors. Originally an arrangement was made with a mid-sized English firm for a formulation exchange. To produce them, \$30,000 of raw materials was purchased. Sales personnel were hired but not a single sale was made. I saw the formulations and they were legitimate. However, they did not suit the local tastes and were too expensive to compete with local manufacturers. After two years of being prodded by the father to move the inventory, the son turned to IESC for help and yours truly became a volunteer.

The first priority was to help them develop a line of inexpensive flavors for cookies, candy and drinks. There are many small Egyptian producers of these products which are sold to the average Egyptian at remarkably low prices. I

examined the end products and competitive flavors and determined that it required no superlative flavor knowledge to make equal or better products. However, using propylene glycol as the solvent (alcohol is taboo) resulted in too high a final cost to be competitive. I learned that vegetable oil was available at a low price and gum Arabic, from nearby Sudan, was also available. Their use enabled me to solve the cost problem. My client was able to produce flavors that he has successfully introduced to the Egyptian market.

What I hope to stress throughout is that when one deals with overseas clients (and I believe it holds true for domestic customers also), one should have the mental attitude of being the client's consultant. If you can't produce a solution that is good for the customer or client, it will, in the long run, not be good for you.

I suggested to my Egyptian client that instead of competing solely with the low cost local producers, that he cater to the larger and higher quality producers of convenience foods, pharmaceuticals, etc. Most of the flavors used by these firms were imported from Europe. Somewhat over a year later, my client located a second-hand spray drier for sale and since the bulk of the flavors imported were spray dried and of a higher quality, I was asked to return on another project. This involved not only flavor spray drying techniques but, principally, enhancing the flavor knowledge and techniques of the client's workers so that they could make superior flavors and modify them to the customer's needs.

In between the two Egyptian projects, I corresponded with a small independent firm in Bogota, Colombia. This firm was importing concentrated flavor bases, diluting them, and selling them locally—primarily to smaller users. The firm was finding it difficult to compete with international flavor producers, especially with the larger customers. In addition, the firm was not in a position to adapt these diluted bases to specific customer needs. It had hired a bright young woman to make the adaptations, but with her limited knowledge and equipment, she was having a difficult time.

Learning of my experience in Egypt, she contacted IESC and I was off to Colombia. The firm had hoped to replace fifteen of its largest selling flavors with flavors of its own manufacture. Fortunately it had sent samples which I had examined and done some preliminary GC work on. In one month in Bogota I was able to help the firm get approval on fourteen formulations to replace the imported bases. I also learned there were many more to replace and strongly urged that they purchase a gas chromatograph. A little over a year later I returned to Bogota to assist them in its use. They had sufficient knowledge to adapt flavors to local requirements and now are in a position to replace additional imported bases where it is economically advisable.

Also, they have better quality control over raw materials and finished products. One reason for the success of this project was the extraordinary markup on the bases sold to them by their European supplier.

What was the benefit to those involved? In Egypt a spice producer is now also a recognized quality supplier of flavors. He is now also an agent there for a U.S. raw material supplier and purchases much of his raw materials from here. I, in turn, got to see the antiquities of Egypt, a short trip to Israel, and a "warm feeling" for the average peaceful, family-oriented, religious Egyptian.

My Colombian experiences resulted in a new factory and laboratory for the local producer with a more than doubling

of staff and substantial salary increases for employees. This firm purchases a good many of its raw materials from the U.S. and purchased more than \$50,000 of equipment here. I learned that Bogota is a lovely city with its own unique architecture and a hard-working population that no more represents the Colombian pictured in our news reports on drugs than the murderous minority in our urban cities represents our citizens. I also gained knowledge of intriguing tropical fruits previously unknown to me. The major lesson to me and one that was most satisfying was that if one enters an arrangement with the mental attitude of being a client's employee, you will find, based on your knowledge, that you are recommending materials, bases, and equipment that are of benefit to your former employer and/or other U.S. suppliers.

One last cynical remark. There would have been greater benefits accumulating to U.S. suppliers from these experiences if they had really listened. Instead, in the larger companies, one frequently finds personnel protecting their turf first and considering the company's interest second.

Lastly, the experiences gained are not likely to be ones we will forget.

Reference

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