

Christmas boost for Midlands businesses

Exports of greeting cards from the UK rose by 1.5% last year to a total value of nearly £63 million. Key destinations include the US, where sales grew by 87.8% (£3.9 million) between 2015 and 2018, while exports to Australia doubled in the same period.

One Midlands firm tapping into this global demand is Stamford based Old English Company, who were aptly named Small Business of the Year at the 2019 Mercury Business Awards. The stationery and giftware company was initially established in 2012, and has since become a successful global e-commerce brand.

For Old English Company, exports to the US alone have increased by nearly 100% since 2016. The company has also recently signed a three-year contract with American card giant Papyrus, which will see them design an array of greeting cards for the retailer. As the largest consumer market on the globe, the US presents huge opportunities for Midlands businesses. In 2018, goods exports from the West Midlands to the US alone totalled £6.6 million.

With over 200 stores across Australia, Germany, Sweden, France, China and the UAE, Old English Company also has an impressive presence here in the UK, being stocked in over 1,000 stores nationwide.

Ben Treanor, Director and Founder at Old English Company, said:

Christmas is by far our busiest time of year and now we can benefit from international seasonal demand due to support from DIT, who have enabled our business to export and grow into new markets, such as the United States, Europe and Asia.

We pride ourselves on being a stylish British brand with strong British roots and as we continue to expand in the United States and across Europe, we are eyeing up the potential opportunity to move our business into Scandinavia with the help of DIT.

Also benefitting from the growing demand for stationery and greeting cards is Loughborough based Ohh Deer. The stationery company works with more than 100 new and upcoming illustrators to create quirky, arty and funny illustrated products.

Ohh Deer exports to 51 countries, with overseas sales accounting for 37% of the company's annual turnover.

To make the most of the global demand for its products, Ohh Deer turned to

DIT for advice on navigating customs regulations and paperwork requirements in countries it was exporting to for the first time.

DIT has supported Ohh Deer from the beginning, providing one-to-one advice from local trade advisors, specialist international embassy consultations, as well as specific trade show grants at international trade shows, which have enabled Ohh Deer to expand their reach.

Laura Philbin, Sales Manager at Ohh Deer, said:

In the lead up to Christmas we see a big increase in sales particularly from the end of November onwards, as Black Friday becomes more of a key trading period in the UK.

We have also seen an increase in international customers over this period. Last Christmas we saw 15% of our overall sales attributed to exports with the US, Germany and Scandinavia being our biggest export markets.

Ian Harrison, DIT's Director of Exports in The Midlands, said:

It is great to see innovative brands like Old English Company and Ohh Deer capitalising on seasonal trade overseas.

Success stories such as these illustrate just how profitable exporting globally can be with overseas consumers increasingly looking for British products and premium quality brands.

DIT has a network of expert trade advisers on the ground in the Midlands to support businesses as they look to start or build their exports.