Minnesota is expanding its role in the global market. In recent years the state has opened foreign trade offices in Brazil, Germany, and South Korea. This is good news for Minnesota’s small and midsize businesses, leading to increased access to foreign markets and more resources for doing business abroad.

For inspiration, they might look to Jet Edge, a designer and manufacturer of waterjet systems for precision cutting, surface preparation, and coating removal. Customers range from job shops to aerospace manufacturers. It’s based in St. Michael, about halfway between Minneapolis and St. Cloud off I-94.

Since its founding in 1984, the company has made significant strides in global trade, partnering with distributors on nearly every continent. After joining a trade mission to China, it opened a showroom in Shanghai in 2011. The next year it won the Governor’s International Trade Award.

Recently, Jet Edge started doing business in a rather unexpected place: Africa. “It’s kind of unique how this opportunity came about,” says Dave Anderson, the company’s international sales manager.

Anderson, as it happens, is also involved with the Minnesota District Export Council, which advocates and facilitates export growth. He’s eager to help small and midsize companies like his engage in global trade.

Following, a look at how equipment manufactured in small-town Minnesota ends up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, thanks to connections formed in China.

Want your own company to go global? The Minnesota District Export Council is a good place to start. See exportassistance.com.
ANOTHER INQUIRY
About a year after the first sale, Cruickshank contacted Jet Edge saying his mining customer was ready to purchase another waterjet cutting system. This time the customer was in need of a five-axis cutting system, as opposed to a two-axis one. “It’s capable of cutting beveled edges and more complex angles than their previous system,” says Anderson. “This eliminates the need for any machining or grinding to perfect the edges after a part is cut.” Again, such capabilities were beyond what the Chinese company offered.

Between December 2013 and March 2014, Jet Edge worked with the mining company to determine which of its products best fit its needs. “Eventually, the customer decided that they wanted two cutting heads instead of just one” Anderson says. “So now you’ve got plans for a system with two five-axis cutting heads, as well as the 90,000 psi pump. This is technology that relatively few other companies offer. It’s the most premium product that we make.”

LETS MAKE A DEAL
Determining needs and negotiating a deal involved a web of communication between Jet Edge’s Shanghai sales office, the company’s Minnesota headquarters, and the distribution partners in Johannesburg. “And of course many emails and a few Skype calls in the middle of the night,” Anderson adds. The sale price for all the equipment and spare parts ended up being more than $750,000.
GETTING IT THERE
The journey of the equipment from its birthplace at Jet Edge’s manufacturing facility in St. Michael is one of truly global proportions. It was shipped by truck, rail, and cargo ship in a single 40-foot container weighing 18,000 pounds, and on a 20-foot flat rack weighing 5,000 pounds. Total door-to-port time was about five weeks and cost upwards of $20,000. After arriving in South Africa, the equipment was shipped on a three-day overland journey by “road train” to the DRC.

TRAINING OFFERED
Though the Jetstream team was experienced with similar types of installations, they needed special training in this case. To that end, they traveled to Minnesota for instruction from Jet Edge’s service and installation technicians.

A NEW USER
One of Jetstream’s customers, it turns out, operates a copper mine in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The client wanted equipment that would cut at a higher pressure than the machines made by its Chinese partner.

Jetstream founder and director Malcolm Cruickshank paid a visit to Jet Edge’s Shanghai office and ended up purchasing one of its ultra high pressure pumps, capable of cutting at 90,000 psi, for his client to use with the Chinese-made system.

“The reason people want that technology is that it cuts faster than machines operating at 60,000 psi, which is already very high pressure,” Anderson explains. Jet Edge specializes in this type of extra high pressure technology.

But Jetstream’s mining customer would soon make a second, more significant request ...

A NEW PARTNER
One result of this endeavor: the naming of Jetstream as an official distributor of Jet Edge cutting equipment. “We’re looking forward to continuing this partnership in the future,” Anderson says.

TRADE MISSION LEADS TO JET EDGE
SETTING UP A SALES OFFICE AND
SHOWROOM IN SHANGHAI

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