BUSINESS

Success concepts: Capture high products from selling foreign-made products here

By Pierre A. Clark
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Your edge in a crowded marketplace of tens of thousands of products competing for the attention of your potential clients is to offer distinctive products with unique features that no one else can offer. One great source of these products are companies and manufacturers from foreign countries.

You're probably aware that many of the most popular products sold in this country — Nokia telephones, Tamagoochi cyberpets, Honda automobiles — are made and imported from foreign countries. In fact, what's often called the trade deficit — the difference between the value of products we export to other countries and import into the United States — has been at an all-time high since the 1980s.

The United States has made a concerted effort to encourage companies to export their products and services to other countries, and there are billions of dollars to be made in exporting. But the fact is that products are winners in the American marketplace because consumers recognize their high quality and desirability and vote for them with their dollars. As a businessperson, if you can discover a high-quality product made overseas and introduce it to American consumers, you're ahead of the game and you're fulfilling the primary role of any entrepreneur - giving the people what they want and need.

Most overseas manufacturers have no idea whatsoever about U.S. customs and what kinds of marketing strategies work best in a diverse nation of over 250,000,000 people. That's the advantage you can sell to these firms as a distributor/marketer of their products.

There are some factors you need to consider when you decide to become a distributor/marketer of products from overseas manufacturers:

Product quality. The exotic mystique that accompanies an imported product will quickly turn to disgust and disappointment if the product quality doesn't meet expectations. It's best to deal with established firms with a reputation for designing and delivering quality products. Information about foreign manufacturers is available from the Department of Commerce or foreign trade associations.

Manufacturer's reliability. It would be a rude shock to invest a great deal of money in establishing retail outlets and rolling out an elaborate marketing plan, only to discover your foreign partner's capacity to produce the products you're distributing is much less than you thought. Again, dealing with an established manufacturer is most often your best strategy. You'll also want to spell out production schedules and delivery guarantees in any agreement you sign.

Legal issues. If your imported food product makes someone sick, who's liable? You most likely will be, unless you execute a disclaimer in your licensing/distribution agreement. You should also have any products with perishable components tested by U.S. experts before you distribute them.

Effects of U.S. trade agreements or restrictions. There are legal restrictions imposed by the U.S. government on doing business with certain nations. You will need to determine whether certain components of your products (especially if you are importing electronics products) are on the list of restricted items.

It's easier than ever to identify and contact overseas manufacturers. More than 100 countries publish directories of businesses listing business with products available for distribution in the United States. The directories are available from the foreign consulates these countries maintain in your city or the U.S. Department of Commerce.

There are some points to consider as you negotiate the actual distribution/marketing agreement. They include:

(1) Method of delivery. Your agreement should include these provisions:

(a) How will the product be delivered? Where will it be delivered? What delivery or storage charges are involved?

(2) Payment terms. Will

(See Success, Page 8)

Empowerment

(Continued from Page 6)

continued: "Jobs in our community and entrepreneurial examples for our children to emulate are vital, and so too is corporate ownership. However, it is a business decision, in light of our current economy, and how the Gardner family (founders and owners of Soft Sheen) chooses to parlay its 35-year investment in the company."

"My sincere wish," Jones said, "is that L'Oreal will simply do the right thing and continue to be a good corporate citizen, just as the Gardner family was — especially on the south side of Chicago. If that occurs, the sale of this Black business will not be perceived as a negative deal."

So, what will we see from this latest sale of the largest Black hair care business to a White-owned company? Are we witnesses to the continuous erosion of Black economic infrastructures? Or, are we on a new path of alliance and partnership?

What we as Black people can do — no, what we must do — is stay vigilant. We must watch the results of this deal and be prepared to withdraw our support, if necesssary. If L'Oreal management turns out to mimic Revlon executives who recently fired many of their top-level Black employees, then we must take reciprocal action.

This time we must not simply threaten, must not simply march and demonstrate; we must protest until change occurs. Economic retribution must be swift, certain, and long term.

If we are not going to own businesses in this global economy, we must make those whom we support accountable for the billions of dollars we provide them. Soft Sheen is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. What about Black-owned radio and Black-owned newspapers? Are we prepared to lose those too?