



FACES of TRADE[®]

Louisville, Kentucky

Lynn Cooper
President

Industry
Hospital Equipment

Number of U.S. Employees
5

Years of International Involvement
18

www.bfwinc.com

BFW, Inc.

Exporting was not initially a major component of BFW's business plan. Before 1990, the company sold its high-powered medical lighting equipment in a few foreign countries but focused mostly on the domestic market. That changed when BFW's leadership realized just how much international demand there was for the company's products. "We were constantly being approached by distributors from other countries that wanted to carry our products," says BFW President Lynn Cooper. So, starting in 1990, the company became much more proactive in its pursuit of overseas markets.

As a result, BFW now exports to dozens of countries on 5 continents, and international sales account for about 25% of the company's total revenue. Cooper says there continues to be a strong worldwide demand for BFW's products. But, she adds, "The challenge is competing against locally-made products that are cheaper." While the company's reputation for high quality provides an important competitive edge, pricing does make a difference.

That's why Cooper is a strong proponent of free trade agreements. "Tariff issues are important," she notes. "If we can work out agreements with other countries with parity for both sides, as we're starting to do, that makes us more competitive."

Such agreements can also ease the at-times onerous burden of complying with the rules and regulations many countries impose on imports.

"It's getting very hard to meet the increasing and ever-changing requirements for medical equipment in Europe. There are always new forms to fill out, and all that paperwork is very time-consuming, especially for a small company."

Despite these challenges, Cooper says the international side of her business has been very personally rewarding. "Working with people in a business relationship," she says, "has enabled me to experience various places and cultures more fully than I ever could have in a different context."