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ExportExchange

Export boost for Yorkshire SMEs as new peer-to-peer business community launches



Businesses in the Leeds City Region are to benefit from a unique regional initiative aimed at boosting international trade, it has been announced today in Leeds. ExportExchange is an online and offline network which aims to help businesses within the city region and beyond to increase exports, grow revenues and create employment.

The ExportExchange programme is backed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and delivered by the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the Department for International Trade (DIT), and a number of private sector media, marketing and export specialists. The initiative was launched by Roger Marsh OBE, chair of the LEP, and Marian Sudbury, director of the Northern Powerhouse for DIT, in Leeds on 30 June at AQL's Salem Chapel building in the Holbeck area of the city.

The launch event saw a host of invited guests from businesses in the Leeds City Region that are already successfully exporting come together as 'patrons' to back a programme that will pool their expertise and know-how to help Yorkshire firms that want to develop their overseas trade.

Marsh said: “The need for businesses to seek more diversified global growth has never been greater. A recent HMRC report found that in the year to March 2017, Yorkshire and the Humber saw a 7.6 per cent increase in the value of exports, so we know the ability to achieve this exists. We challenged the business community to mobilise expertise within the region to help a new generation of would-be exporters and, with the collaboration of over 50 new patrons from some of the region’s most successful exporters, we’ve built a unique support network that is 100 per cent free to use.”

Under the ExportExchange programme, the patrons, all experienced exporters and business leaders from across the Leeds City Region - which includes Skipton and Harrogate in the north, Barnsley in the south, and York - will share their expertise on every aspect of exporting and growth with fledgling SME exporters.

Peer-to-peer advice, based on years of global trading in diverse sectors and markets, is central to the initiative and mentoring will also be on offer for businesses that are looking for help with trading overseas. The initiative also includes a bespoke online portal, www.ExportExchange.co.uk, that directs enquiries and requests for assistance securely to the most qualified and relevant patron.

Victoria Boldison, network manager for the initiative, said: “Dozens of firms across Leeds, Harrogate, Huddersfield, Barnsley and York have already come to us and signed up online and forwarded specific enquiries during our testing and recruitment process, and we are now opening the ExportExchange network to registrations from any business in the region. It takes just a couple of minutes to register and fire in a question or enquiry with a couple of clicks, it really is that simple.”

A series of quarterly events is planned as part of ExportExchange to bring experienced and would-be exporters together, to inform on key issues and to provide interaction between patrons and businesses. The events are also designed to help businesses navigate the range of overseas trade resources available regionally.

Dr Richard Smith, managing director at Leeds-based chemicals group Surfachem, said: “Exporting can seem daunting, and any initiative that helps businesses here to take that first step, or gives them a leg up is really worthwhile. Surfachem is committed to having a positive impact on the wider community, and we are looking forward to sharing any advice or contacts that we can with those businesses that could be the next generation of star Yorkshire exporters.”

Victoria Hopkins, one of the 50 ExportExchange founding patrons and managing director at Pudsey-based catering equipment manufacturer Hopkins Catering, was among the first patrons to sign up to the scheme. “We have learned so many lessons in our experience with overseas joint ventures and trade deals that I wish I had known before we started exporting. If we can share these experiences and help other local employers to be successful faster, then that has to be a good thing, and we are more than

willing to help. We also see the benefit for our own business too: it is always good to know other exporters locally, and you can never have enough expertise in overseas trade,” she said.

Marsh concluded: “Leeds City Region’s economic success depends on the growth of our business sector. That much-needed growth could come from selling more overseas, creating a positive impact for local businesses and the wider UK economy. ExportExchange is one more way we can help the people who run businesses, and we look forward to building a supportive and lively community.”

More information on the initiative and how to receive free overseas trade advice and support is available at: www.exportexchange.co.uk.