



An Entrepreneur Goes International

Nate Huskins of the Marshal Group LLC turned a passion for cars, sales, and entrepreneurship into a thriving export business. Pictured above, Nate with the new Porsche Macan, outside his new company headquarters in Washington, IL.

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Summer 2014

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By James Foley, Director,
Turner Center Operations, Illinois SBDC International Trade Center

Nate Huskins, founder and president of the Marshal Group LLC, has always loved cars. To be more precise, he loves selling cars. At age 19 he joined a local GM dealership following in the footsteps of his father who worked at the same dealership. It was a great fit. By the second year he was salesman of the year – an award he continued to get for

five more years in a row. With that sort of success and excellent income, Nate never thought he'd leave the security of the job at the dealership. But his entrepreneurial interests were getting the best of him. While at the dealership he saw the potential in online auto sales using sites such as autotrader.com and eBay. But those were domestic sales.

The first export sale was a bit of a fluke. A buyer in Iceland was bidding against U.S. buyers for a car Nate had listed on eBay. As Nate explains, "It actually kind of upset me because the Iceland buyer was pushing up the price, and I had no intention of selling to a non-U.S. buyer." In the end he did sell to the Iceland buyer. That first sale led to more, and before long Nate realized the real growth was to focus on exports. Taking a big leap of faith, he quit the dealership job to run his export business full time. He never imagined these small beginnings would within a few years become a multi-million dollar business.

From the beginning it was a family effort. His mom was a very experienced office manager. As his first employee, she started helping with the mounting paperwork. It also was when Nate was not yet married and living at home. He jokes, "By the third year sales hit \$24 million, and I was still working out of my



bedroom!" As the growth continued, so did employees and office space. Today he employs nine staff and is just about to move into new headquarters in Washington, IL. Sales in 2013 hit \$50 million.

How does a guy that has no international travel experience sell to so many international buyers in countries as diverse as Russia and China? "I am just myself. My key is to work hard, be sincere, and develop trust." He concedes the hours are brutal. In order to respond to an inquiry from a potential buyer on the same business day as the buyer, he often finds himself emailing until 2 a.m. In fact, Asia has become his strongest market; though, in the early years, Europe and South America were stronger. When asked about foreign languages Nate joked that English is all he has to offer, and in some respects, his own English is getting worse. "I have had to adjust my speaking and writing to a much more broken English. For example, I now say 'green is the color of the car' rather than 'the color of the car is green' because that fits the format of some languages." If he doesn't catch

The Turner Center for Entrepreneurship was established in 2001 by a gift from Robert Turner '77 MBA '78 and his wife, Carolyn. The Center brings together entrepreneurial education, research, and related programs to provide business and technical assistance to individuals in starting their own business and to existing businesses who want to expand or take advantage of new business opportunities.

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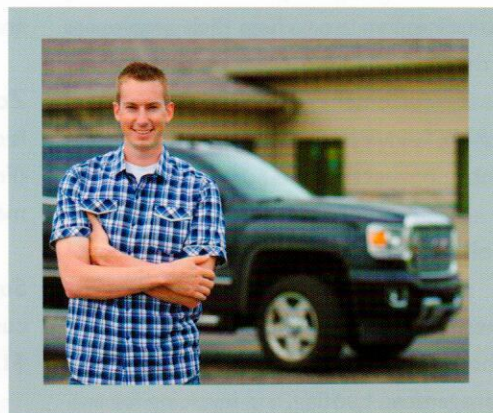
himself, he finds himself using that same format with friends who wonder what has happened to his English. It also presents challenges when visitors have limited English. Recently, when hosting a foreign buyer at his home, his wife welcomed the buyer by saying, "How was your flight?" To which the reply came, "No thank you!"

Nate primarily deals in higher end cars including BMW, Porsche, Mercedes Benz, Land Rover, but also includes other models such as GM, Ford, Dodge, Toyota, and Nissan. His most expensive car was a Rolls Royce Phantom Extended Wheelbase which listed for \$543,000. The buyer mentioned he would not need the car for a few weeks, giving Nate a chance to drive it around Central Illinois. He remembers the fun. "It got more than

a few looks when we drove into the McDonald's in Washington!"

Growing so quickly has also meant leveraging local resources, including Bradley University. Nate participated as a client in a Foster College of Business Management Information Systems (MIS) class in which students work to develop online databases. The project was such a success, Nate hired one of the students to continue development of the site. It has significantly reduced their paperwork as each sales order now has only one electronic record that can be viewed by both staff at Nate's company, as well as the buyers, suppliers, and freight forwarder each with unique logins to protect the specific data each can view.

As for the next step in his future, his main task now is building a new 4,300 square foot headquarters in Washington. It'll be a long way from his beginnings in his bedroom. But it means he's well positioned for even greater success in the future.



Top Five Reasons Why Companies Fail on Solicitations

By Greg Faulkner, Director,
Illinois Procurement Technical Assistance Center

The Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) is the guidebook government contracting officers use to acquire the many goods and services utilized by the federal government. The FAR is comprised of 53 parts and is codified in Title 48, Chapter 1 of the US Code of Federal Regulations.

At a recent workshop, government contracting officers discussed the top five reasons why companies fail in their responses to government solicitations. One might think failures result from complicated written solicitations or that the offerors are unable to find what they need in the solicitation to adequately respond. However, according to the survey of procurement officials, the top five reasons why companies responses fail are: 1) lack of attention to detail;

2) failure to demonstrate an understanding of requirements; 3) not following solicitation instructions; 4) lack of responsiveness to solicitations; and 5) not making it easy to check references and establish past performance records.

To avoid these simple, but common mistakes, companies should understand that almost all solicitations are organized in the same way in accordance with the Uniform Contract Format. Pertinent details and instructions can be easily found in sections B and C of Part 1 and sections L and M in Part 4 of the solicitation. Section B in Part 1 outlines the supplies or services required, including a brief description and the quantity needed by the contracting agency. Section C provides the statement of work and specifications according to the

agency's needs. Section L in Part 4 contains the instructions and conditions, and section M identifies the evaluation factors used to award the contract. If companies read and understand these sections first, not only will they quickly understand the solicitation but will also understand exactly what the agency is asking for and know exactly what the evaluation factors are to be successful.

On your next solicitation, take the time to read it in its entirety and pay special attention to sections B, C, L, and M. If you have questions, contact Greg Faulkner at gfaulkner@bradley.edu or (309) 677-3297 for assistance and also know the contracting officer writing the solicitation must respond to inquiries as well.