

SBA honoree salutes state's business-resource network

Written by By Claudia Infante, Projects Coordinator New Mexico MEP
Friday, 29 April 2016 04:44



Karl Halpert's collaborative relationships with multiple business service providers has helped the Taos entrepreneur build Private Label Select (PLS) into the personal-care industry's premier maker of lip balms, lip tints and other cosmetics in just 22 years.

The business is growing so robustly — with annual growth of 40 to 50 percent — that the U.S. Small Business Administration recently named the company's president and chief executive officer the Small Business Person of the Year for New Mexico. Before the celebration of that achievement May 5 in Albuquerque, Halpert will travel to Washington, D.C., to learn if he's been named the nation's top entrepreneur for 2016.

At its Taos plant, PLS develops and manufactures natural and organic cosmetics for many clients, including such retail giants as Walgreens and Target and prestigious cosmetics companies like Estée Lauder.

"We accurately predicted years ago that organic products were going to enter the mainstream (mass market)," Halpert said. So PLS focused on research and development and acquiring the credentials required for mass-market competition, including obtaining federal certification as a maker of organic products.

Once he began tapping into the network of funding and training resources available to small businesses, Halpert's company improved its profitability and became a significant job creator in Northern New Mexico.

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New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership helped PLS implement quality-management systems and elevate its supply-chain management expertise. A class on International Standards Organization (ISO) certification co-sponsored by New Mexico MEP and the state Economic Development Department, Halpert said, “provided us with an extremely important template for setting our company up on a quality-management system that would pass our largest customers’ requirements.” Halpert credits MEP’s ongoing assistance with helping PLS land a major account with Colgate.

MEP also helped PLS design its new plant, which is three times larger than the original, to accommodate increased client demand — and to move to the new space in 2014 without pausing production. “We conducted the move in the middle of successfully launching a huge product line for The Honest Company without interruption. We had to bring utilities to the building and re-certify the new facility to meet USDA Organic and FDA guidelines. Again, MEP’s support was invaluable.”

Once inside the network of resource providers, PLS connected with additional assistance that proved critical to its growth.

At the state level, PLS participates in the Job Training Incentive Program and has hired, trained and promoted many employees through this channel. Its collaboration with the state Economic Development Department’s Office of International Trade has allowed representatives to join several trade missions to Asia and the Middle East.

“Recognition by the SBA ... gives me a platform to encourage other small businesses, especially ones in rural areas, to take advantage of what the state and federal government offer in assistance,” Halpert said. “It is a common misconception that these programs benefit the larger companies only. While small businesses certainly need the infrastructure and commitment to take advantage of these programs, they are readily available and can make a significant difference. ... In small towns and rural areas, this impact is significant.”

For more information about funding and training resources, visit HYPERLINK “ <http://www.FinanceNewMexico.org>

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The SBA Small Business Week Awards Breakfast is May 5 from 8-10 a.m. at the Sandia Golf Club in Albuquerque. Register at: ahcnm.org, under the events tab.

Finance New Mexico assists individuals and businesses with obtaining skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more, visit: www.FinanceNewMexico.org

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