

THE WORLD'S POLICEMAN

EXPORTER BRINGS BEST PRACTICES AND SAFETY TO LAW ENFORCEMENT WORLDWIDE

by Erin Butler
U.S. Commercial Service

Florida entrepreneur Roy Bedard sells more than police batons and handcuffs. His commitment to better and more humane policing methods is his signature product — and he's selling it all over the world.

Bedard is the President and founder of RRB Systems, a Tallahassee, Florida police and security equipment and training company. Like many entrepreneurs, Bedard's business grew out of a personal interest. A policeman since 1987, Bedard wanted equipment that would encourage responsible, humane, and effective policing. He also saw a need for tools that would make it easier for smaller police officers, such as women, to more effectively do their jobs.

His breakthrough product? A police baton that he calls "a better mousetrap." The Rapid Rotation Baton features multiple handles that make it versatile in a variety of situations. It's difficult for a non-cop to appreciate the design, says Bedard, but explains that the baton is "so unique that it has

carried me all over the world." His Rapid-Cuff system, with a solid bar center (rather than a chain) to allow better control of handcuffed suspects, is another key product.

But what really sets RRB apart from other equipment suppliers is Bedard's

Global Policing Initiative — a model for modern policing, especially useful to developing countries. The Initiative combines equipment training, consulting, and policy reviews to bring policing's best practices to other countries. Bedard says that the U.S. police force is widely respected internationally. "The



"A Better Mousetrap": Roy Bedard of RRB Systems (left) and Mike Higgins of the Tallahassee U.S. Export Assistance Center with the company's signature Rapid Rotation Baton.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Commercial Service

U.S. has the world's model police force," says Bedard. "We have the reputation of doing it better."

The flow of ideas goes the other way, too. Bedard's global perspective lets him take ideas from foreign police forces to augment his U.S. training. The result? A global policing model composed of the most modern ideas and equipment in the world. His staff of international police experts provide consultation to law enforcement, corrections, and security organizations worldwide.

RRB GOES AROUND THE WORLD

For many small business owners, finding customers is the hardest part. Not so for Bedard. He kicked off his business in 1995 with an exhibit at the International Association of Chiefs of Police show in Miami, and interest in his products was high. "The international inquiries came right away, and they scared me," he recalls.

That's when Bedard called the Tallahassee U.S. Export Assistance Center, where he met International Trade Specialist Mike Higgins. "We've become friends," says Bedard. "Mike has been a tremendous help, and has given me lots of information on foreign markets." The Tallahassee Center is part of the U.S. Commercial Service, a Commerce Department agency that has an international network of specialists like Higgins who help U.S. companies make international sales.

Bedard began with little formal knowledge of sales and business strategy — especially international. "I was a cop! Selling wasn't my area," he laughs. But before long he was aggressively pursuing export business.

He especially likes the U.S. Commercial Service's Gold Key Service, which matched him with pre-screened partners in the markets he targeted — and took care of the logistics of his



Taking a Hit for Trade: Roy Bedard of RRB Systems demonstrates the Rapid Rotation Baton on International Trade Specialist Mike Higgins.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Commercial Service

overseas trips. "It saves time and money on the front end," he explains. "Our prospects are all pre-qualified — I know all about them before I walk in the door" — a piece of detective work that impressed him.

Bedard also recommends trade missions, having been on a quite a few. He accompanied Florida Governor Jeb Bush across Latin America — to Mexico, Brazil, Chile and Argentina; Bedard also headed to Europe on a mission to Spain. He advises other small businesses to learn about the range of export assistance available from federal and state sources. For him, Mike Higgins and his partners at TEAM Florida, which includes the state economic development agency, Enterprise Florida, as well as Chambers of Commerce, World Trade Centers, and Small Business Development Centers have been a valuable resource.

Bedard still does part-time police work, and it's clear that policing remains his

calling. His Web site features an online chat forum for police officers called the "Cop Café," and he's eminently knowledgeable on international police practices and challenges. "It was a leap of faith to leave a full-time police job," says Bedard. But it's a leap Bedard is glad he took. ■