

## Success Profile



**Name:** Robyn Gourley,  
Founder & Co-Owner

**Company:** Costa Nada,  
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[www.costanada.com](http://www.costanada.com)

**Year Established:** 1994

**# Employees:** 3 full-time plus over 12 sewers and part-time staff

**Description:** Designer and manufacturer of hand dyed original clothing and resort wear for women, men and children. The company sells its product line wholesale and also does custom corporate work, such as t-shirts and hats, for clients like General Electric. Costa Nada was chosen to do the dye work for specialty promotions for Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream.

**How Started:** "I started sewing as a hobby while living on Vancouver Island. My husband, William, dyed the clothes I made, which everyone liked so much that the whole thing grew into a business from our basement. People love the fact that each garment is hand dyed and therefore unique."

**Path to Growth:** "We grew so quickly that, within months, William quit his job to join me full time and we moved back to Toronto. With our rapid growth, it made more sense to be someplace where we

can access everything easier - from fabric suppliers to sewers to cheaper shipping rates. And our four-year-old son is even part of our business. He's our best model and we take him wherever we go."

**Export Sales:** 50%

**Export Markets:** U.S., Caribbean and Japan

**Export Goals:** To expand more into the Caribbean "because that's where a lot of the cruise ships stop and our product is perfectly geared to tourist-driven markets. As soon as there is water and a palm tree, our product is right."

**Help Accessed:** PEMD (Program for Export Market Development); trade mission

**Benefits:** "PEMD was extremely good for helping us expand faster. It allowed us to take on three times as many trade shows than our budget permitted. We were lucky enough to connect with someone at Industry Canada who spent time with us and has been such a good support system. We also went on a trade mission to Chicago to find sales reps. Today we have 12 reps across the U.S."

**E-Commerce Strategy:** "The first step was buying the name and setting up our web site ([www.costanada.com](http://www.costanada.com)). With an on-line catalogue (all prices in U.S. dollars), it's a

good information tool for retailers and it has been customized to attract new wholesale accounts as well. The next step is marketing the site through advertising in relevant publications and then we'll move to on-line transactions through a shopping cart and on-line order form. It will be a great medium, allowing us to market to places we normally wouldn't, like Europe."

**Biggest Challenge:** "Getting paid."

### Robyn's Export Tips:

- Get all the information you can before you decide where to export to ensure you understand different regulations.
- Find a good customs broker who'll educate you and show you the ropes.
- Touch base with local governments through the Canadian Consulates and find out what you can do to make your shipments go faster.
- Make sure your paperwork is impeccable. Be diligent and don't try to hide anything.
- Check out the competition in the area you want to export to make sure your product will be competitive there.
- Go on trade missions to find good representatives in your target markets.