

HARD WORK PAYS OFF FOR ACENDRE WITH SUCCESSFUL US EXPANSION

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Eighteen months after setting up in the US, Acendre secured its first enterprise-level customer, the US Department of Agriculture.

Co-founder and CEO Mike Giuffrida credits the company's success to plenty of time, patience and hard work, including strategic steps undertaken in the early stages, extensive market research enabling an informed expansion decision, utilising in-market service providers and establishing an on-the-ground presence.

Giuffrida is optimistic about the future after securing additional major contracts with the US Department of Homeland Security and NASA.

Discovering opportunities

Acendre was founded in Australia in 1997 and for the first 10 years the company focused on becoming established in the local market.

'We built a successful company that delivered cloud-based, human capital investment and recruitment technology. Later we expanded to people onboarding and performance technology,' says Giuffrida.

'In 2008, we started evaluating international expansion opportunities, specifically in the US or UK and Europe.

'One of my initial outreaches was to Austrade. We provided a brief on the type of people we wanted to meet with and Austrade arranged a schedule of meetings for us in Washington DC and London. This included meeting quite senior US Federal



'The journey up to this point has been blood, sweat and tears. We are now in a strong position and the next couple of years are going to be exciting for Acendre, particularly in the US.'

Mike Giuffrida, Co-founder and CEO, Acendre

Government representatives and other partners that provided services to the US Federal Government,' he says.

'The meetings were a turning point for us. It provided us with the opportunity to demonstrate our products to target groups, gain feedback about the competitive landscape, quantify the addressable market and determine whether there was an opportunity for us to compete.'

Giuffrida notes the interactions provided a baseline understanding and the confidence to take the next step, choosing to expand in the US.

'In 2010, we sent our first person to Washington DC to set up a sales office,' he says. 'We secured our first customer and this reference became a platform to show the US Federal Government that we were tried and proven.'

Finding the right niche

Acendre's mission is to drive workforce performance improvements for its customers. 'Our human capital



Australian Government

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technology helps organisations source, select, hire and on-board the right people. It also extends to development planning and manages performance to ensure clear alignment between expectations and staff performance,' Giuffrida says.

Decades of experience working with Australian customers in regulated industries, such as the Australian Taxation Office, allowed Acendre to focus on a niche industry in the US.

'The US is full of international software companies and renowned for being a competitive and difficult industry to enter,' says Giuffrida.

'We identified early on that the US Federal Government sector would be our vertical industry focus. Our technology aligns with organisations that are in regulated industries and have complex business processes,' says Giuffrida.

'When going international it's important to understand the addressable market you're competing in and the competitive landscape. The US is such a large market that you can go after a smaller niche, which will still be quite substantial in its own right.'

Advice for expanding globally

'I can't over-emphasise the importance of undertaking extensive initial research before making the investment to enter the US. This is something that Austrade and the Export Market Development Grants (EMDG) scheme assisted us with,' says Giuffrida.

'I also highly recommend considering cultural differences during your research. Two eye-openers for us in the US were finding staff that could be flexible within their roles and the different communication styles.'

'Setting up in the US is similar to establishing yourself in Australia. You are starting again from scratch and it will take time to get initial customers, deliver a positive experience, leverage referrals and translate all of this into a business that can scale and grow.'

The future

Acendre has four offices in Australia, the US and India, over 100 staff and continues to grow.

'We are very optimistic about our future, particularly in the US,' says Giuffrida.

'The US is 60 per cent of our overall business and a real growth market given its size. We are excited about what we are doing in this market and want to continue to invest, grow, hire more staff and build a really successful global company.'

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- › develop international markets
- › win productive foreign direct investment
- › promote international education
- › strengthen Australia's tourism industry
- › seek consular and passport services.

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