

Start small, grow big

The "Grand Old Man" of FINNMAP Sven Wik reminisces his close to 40 years at the company and explains what made FINNMAP so successful abroad.

"I came to work at FINNMAP in 1960 from a teaching and research job at Ohio State University. At that time the export business was slowly starting. We took part in international exhibitions to make the company known in the market.

I was responsible for our first ever successful foreign project which was a three month road mapping subcontracting assignment in Iran in 1961.

I felt at that time that if we were to expand the business successfully, we needed a partner that would show us the right methods. We ended up doing a lot of subcontract work for the largest company in the field at that time, Hunting Surveys, England.

Hunting Surveys sent us one of their people to teach our staff how they were plotting maps from aerial photographs. This got us started.

Customs and co-operation

After studying the Zambian and Nigerian markets in the mid-70's we ended up doing a lot of work in Libya. In those years after the oil crisis the price of oil had gone up and the oil producing states had become rich. More construction was carried out and that called for more maps.

In Libya we learned that you have to know how to compete in each country. You had to know the right people. In Libya it was customary to give something small, such as car parts, which could not be found on the market in Libya. But every country has its own customs.

At the end of the 80's we were moving towards the Asian market. Bangladesh desperately needed new maps but they had no money. Fortunately the Finnish Foreign Ministry agreed to distribute development co-operation funds to start the mapping of the country.

The first project in Bangladesh was fairly small, but it was just right for starting operations in a new country. I had a principle that you must start small and only then move on to larger assignments. There is no sense in entering a new market on a big project – that endeavor is almost sure to fail.

Memories of Asia

Nepal was another country in desperate need of new maps. After a long battle that project was also funded from development co-operation funds. I visited Nepal whenever possible after start. I still receive holiday greetings from the director of the mapping authority of Nepal. We really became a good friends and I even was invited to his home several times during my travels to Nepal.

Working was enjoyable in Asia. The fondest memories I have are of my last project in Cambodia. We commenced a project to restore the land register which had been destroyed by Pol Pot's regime. The project is still ongoing today.

Cambodia is a very pleasant country. In some way I feel that, the harsher ordeals the people have gone through the more friendly they are.

Looking back to those years with FINNMAP, I can conclude that my work was most interesting. I had a management in the company that gave me a lot of freedom in my work and a staff that was committed to their work, wherever it was.

It is my pleasure to see FM-International Oy FINNMAP doing well on the market of today, which is much harder than during my time.

To summarize the road to success shortly

- Select the countries of operation with care
- Start with a small project to learn to avoid mistakes
- Then go with power for bidding on the big ones
- Train and use local staff for project execution.

FM-International Oy FINNMAP is an independent, privately owned consulting company with major activities in land management and administration, remote sensing, digital mapping, surveying and GIS.

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