



Choosing Passionate Partners Key to Global Growth

FEATURED MEMBER

Stonewall Kitchen, a nationally recognized manufacturing, retail and wholesale distribution company, has been owned and operated by founders Jonathan King and Jim Stott since 1991. From the beginning, the company was based on Maine ideals: unspoiled beauty, wholesomeness, and a sense of community. Headquartered in York, Maine, today the company boasts more than 6,000 wholesale accounts nationwide, thriving catalog and web divisions, nine retail Company Stores along the East Coast, and a growing staff – 68% women – of approximately 300, which swells to 450 with seasonal hires. Stonewall Kitchen has been a MITC Member since December 2010.

Stonewall Kitchen is one of the most awarded specialty food companies in the United States. Since 1993, the company has been a regular finalist and award winner from NASFT (National Association for the Specialty Food Trade). What's new is that over the last five years Stonewall Kitchen has gained similar recognition on the international stage.

At SIAL, the top global marketplace for new and innovative specialty food products attended by 140,000 food industry

professionals from 200 countries, Stonewall Kitchen has received multiple Trends and Innovations Nominations, most recently for Chocolate Jams and Habanero Mango Aioli (SIAL Paris 2012) and Dark Chocolate Sea Salt Caramel Sauce and Roasted Peach Whiskey Sauce (SIAL Canada 2011). Last year at Anuga in Cologne, Germany, the company's Espresso Rub was highlighted as a new, innovative product and won the Taste11 Award.

The company also exhibits at both Fancy Food Shows (Winter in



Stonewall Kitchen's top-selling international products are described as "savory" and include ketchups, grille sauces, and rubs. (Photo courtesy of Stonewall Kitchen)

California and Summer in New York) each year where, according to International Sales Manager Carol Deeney, she meets some of the best quality leads for future international distributors.

“International interest in our company has definitely grown in the last five years,” Deeney said. “Now potential partners are coming to us.”

Deeney, who has been with Stonewall Kitchen for 7 years, explained that while she does make a target market list for new international opportunities each year, “I’ve learned that it’s a moving target. We can’t script it. We need to be flexible and respond to people who come to us. The kind of passionate partners who truly get and love our brand as much as we do are not usually found by cold calling.”



Stonewall Kitchen Photographer Michael Cabelin prepares to take a product shot for the company’s exhibit booth at Gulfood in Dubai in February 2013.



In October, Stonewall Kitchen began construction to expand its York headquarters with a 5,200 square foot Merchandising and Design Center and two loading dock bay doors with completion scheduled for March 2013.



What is the Stonewall Kitchen brand?

“Basically, it comes down to quality in every aspect from the equipment to the ingredients we use,” Director of Marketing Janine Somers commented. “Jonathan King is the driving force behind our brand. Innovation and creativity are vital elements. Packaging is also a huge part of it. Brand is really important here.”

Stonewall Kitchen first began selling internationally 15 years ago in Canada. Today, with Canada as the company’s most developed foreign market, their products are sold in over 40 countries across Europe, the Middle East, Central America, and Southeast Asia. International sales represent about 8% of the company’s wholesale business.



Labels for Stonewall Kitchen products that are exported to Canada must be printed in both English and French, the two national languages.



From left, Director of Marketing Janine Somers, International Sales Manager Carol Deeney, and Director of National Sales Kathy Gilbert are the core team providing Stonewall Kitchen’s international and domestic partners with branding and marketing support for advertising, promotional activities, and tradeshow.

“We saw export sales increase by over 50% from 2007 to 2011 with current YTD sales exceeding total sales for 2011,” Deeney noted. Because each country has a different set of customs and import rules, as well as product labeling requirements, Deeney said that having a thorough understanding of all parameters and the proper documentation before products are shipped are essential to avoiding delays and ensuring smooth customs clearance.

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“Having partners who understand the specific rules and requirements

in their country is critical for us,” Deeney said. “The MITC staff and interns are also a valuable resource for everything we need from HS codes to import data. Through MITC we have access to resources and research that we would not have on our own.”

“MITC is a pot of gold,” Kathy Gilbert, Director of National Sales, agreed. “It’s one stop shopping for any international questions, and we know that we’ll get the right information.”

According to Somers, the story of how Stonewall Kitchen was founded by two friends who were waiters, cooks, and avid gardeners is the “Great American Dream” that resonates globally. However, there have been a few surprises for Stonewall Kitchen in entering new markets with different diets and cultures.



For example, Maine blueberry jam products that sell very well in the U.S. have not done as well internationally. On the other hand, barbequing is becoming very popular in Germany, so Stonewall Kitchen's grille sauces and rubs are taking off there.

"In China, people do not have ovens... Vidalia onions are a very American thing, not really known much elsewhere," Deeney said. "We sent this gorgeous photo for a

marketing piece to Germany that included green asparagus. They don't have green asparagus there. It's white."

On the international front, Deeney admits with a chuckle, "We're still learning new things every day."

*Text and photos by Cheryl Rau,
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