Moscow Fair Offers Business Souvenirs

EXHIBITION
By Bojan Soc
The Moscow News

Nikolai Dolbin runs a business with an annual turnover of 1 million.

“Dollars?” I ask.

“No, rubles,” he replies, laughing heartily at my assumption that we’re talking the U.S. currency.

The small business launched five years ago by the young entrepreneur from Russia’s fourth-largest city of Yekaterinburg may be generating only $40,000 in annual revenue per year, but it keeps growing, he adds.

His company, named Original for all the right reasons, employs five people to produce souvenirs making plaques such as “original souvenirs” and souvenir plaques.

“We want to be a bright spot in an ocean of Chinese merchandise, which has swept the country,” explains Dolbin.

He did choose his market niche smartly - it is hard to imagine Chinese producers making plaques with inscriptions citing famous Russian and foreign writers, philosophers or just wise people saying wise things.

Bankers and traders definitely appreciate the one about “Money is minted freedom,” or another one suggesting that “Down payment is the guarantee of good relations.”

Dolbin’s firm is just one of about 600 companies — including 200 from abroad — hailing from 20 countries — showcasing their merchandise these days at Moscow’s Gifts Expo Autumn 2007 Exhibition. The fair opened on Tuesday at Gostiny Dvor and Mariinsky exhibition halls and closes today. It is held twice a year, in spring and autumn.

The companies specializing in business souvenirs and corporate-branded gifts make up just a fraction of all exhibitors, but demand for their products is continually rising.

Take Rusky Khrustal (Russian Crystal), for instance. According to general director Vitaliy Yakovlev, the customers’ taste is becoming more deliberate as demand gradually shifts from the economy sector to businesses, elite, VIP, you name it.

Visiting delegations number 300 people on average and each of them needs a gift. The company’s protocol officials pen strict requirements and we work to meet their demands,” Yakovlev says.

Gifts are selected meticulously, with special care, taking into account the visitors’ national customs and habits.

“Tal’s tak has a special ownership trademark — Roseboro export, for example. Visiting delegations number 300 people on average and each of them needs a gift. The company’s protocol officials pen strict requirements and we work to meet their demands,” Yakovlev says.

If paying several thousand dollars for a decanter is setting back your corporate budget, you may think of more practical options.

The H Moscow-based Studioya Koproporation Design 11 (SKD, Corporate Design Studio) caters to a wide array of businesses, applying a flexible pricing policy and maintaining a neat performance track record.

These people know the true value of time, just as do their clients who place orders for corporate-branded watches and clocks. The clientele ranges from businesses, government agencies, advertising firms, media organizations, sports clubs, and others.

“Large orders are usually placed on the eve of big holidays, such as New Year’s Day or Women’s Day. Gifts are always in demand, especially those that carry a logo,” SKD development manager Yuri Nikolayev says.

The company’s product range also includes corporate-branded mugs, pens, baseball caps, T-shirts and other textile products.

So if you’re looking to establish your identity among business peers and need to do it quickly, this may be an option for you. All you need is some cash and... a logo! •

GEOLGY
By Bojan Soc
The Moscow News

The Russian government needs to be more generous when it comes to funding academic institutions that train geologists. Otherwise, already underfunded geology schools will have trouble providing good-quality training for those who will help discover minerals and metals deeply buried in the subsoil of the world’s largest country, a panel of scientists from the Moscow-based Russian State University for Geological Exploration (RGGGU) told a press conference Monday.

“We are entitled to 60,000 rubles in budget funds per student annually, and we need at least 120,000 rubles to provide good training. And still, compared with the cost of geology training abroad, this is just a fraction of that money,” said RGGGU provost for science Oleg Bychkovskiy.

He added that the ongoing switch by Russia’s universities to the Western, two-semester system is proving difficult for RGGGU.

“There is simply not enough time to train a bachelor of geology within four years,” he said.

According to RGGGU rector Anatoly Korsakov, Russia experiences a shortage of young, well-trained geologists, whose main shortcoming is the lack of practical training in the field. If nothing changes, the aging generations of geologists who started working in the Soviet Union will be hard to replace.

“Some of them grew old, some others quit and took up jobs at private companies, taking with them abundant knowledge,” Korsakov said.

The shortage of qualified geologists, coupled with the trend of the past decade when oil companies pumped as much crude as possible with the Soviet oil industry’s dismantling it was passed in 1992, had certain good points, but due to the Soviet oil industry’s dismantling it failed to work as the major crude oilfield concessions had already been awarded to private companies emerging at that time. These, in turn, put a major stress on production, investing next to nothing into the discovery of new reservoirs.

The scientists added that new owners bothered only skimming easily accessible reserves, never bothering to maximize recovery.

“In Soviet times the oil recovery factor used to be 0.35 percent, today it is 0.93 percent. We are losing billions of dollars of crude because of such attitude,” Korsakov said.

He also lamented what he called the low level of competence among government officials who have failed so far in putting together a viable policy on geological exploration. As long as Russia doesn’t have one, geology will not drive the oil industry, he thinks.

“We now have a new government and I am eager to see if it will be more responsive to experts’ advice,” concluded Korsakov.

Russia’s Geology in Dire Straits

Schools need more funds to provide good-quality training for future specialists in geological exploration.

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