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Small businesses' world is getting smaller



CHRISTOF STACHE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES - President Obama this week announced that leaders from the United States and European Union will begin negotiating a new transatlantic trade partnership next month in Washington.

By J.D. Harrison, Published: June 20 | Updated: Friday, June 21, 3:00 AM [E-mail the writer](#)

Avram Saunders's company provides an unconventional service: shielding buildings from storm damage by creating a force field that diffuses electricity around any given facility.

His method has been called "voodoo" by some in the United States, but that hasn't fazed Saunders. Had U.S. firms not been skeptical, he might not have looked so hard for international clients, which now make up about two-thirds of his business.

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Had the U.S. government not lent a hand, though, he might never have found them.

"We're a small company, so on our own, it would be physically and financially impossible to identify new markets in, say, Australia or Nigeria," said Saunders, chief executive of Lightning Eliminators and Consultants. "We have benefited a lot from services provided by Uncle Sam."

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Headquartered in Boulder, Colo., with only 29 employees, the company sells to some of the largest manufacturing, data and oil-storage centers in 70 countries, earning

Saunders an exporting award this month from the Department of Commerce.

His firm isn't the only one finding success abroad. More [small businesses](#) are selling products and services overseas, due in part to a renewed emphasis on exporting in Washington.

Some 64 percent of small businesses have sold merchandise or services to customers abroad, up from 52 percent in 2010, according to [a recent poll](#) by the National Small Business Association, an advocacy and research group. Of those that have not sold abroad, the number considering exporting in the future has jumped even more markedly, up to 63 percent from 43 percent.

"Not only are small businesses seeing growing opportunities available to them via exporting, they increasingly view their goods and/or services as valuable in a global marketplace," NSBA Chairman David Ickert said.

The rise in exporting comes as government leaders look for ways to make foreign markets more accessible to U.S. businesses.

During his State of the Union address in 2010, President Obama announced a new government-wide effort called the [National Export Initiative](#), aiming to double the country's sales abroad to \$2 trillion by 2015. U.S. firms are on pace to meet that goal, hitting a record \$555 billion in exports in the first quarter.

Policymakers have taken steps to ensure that even the smallest firms have exporting opportunities. Those steps include the State Trade and Export Promotion grant program, approved as part of the Small Business Jobs Act.

Saunders says the grants helped fund recent trips to foreign countries in search of new customers and partnerships.

His company also has relied on the [Export-Import Bank](#), which provides credit insurance and loan guarantees to foreign buyers of American-made goods. Congress reauthorized the program a year ago, and in the process, lawmakers upped its lending authority from \$100 billion to \$140 billion through 2014.

Saunders says the ranks of small exporters would be larger, and the economy stronger, if policymakers eliminated lingering regulatory barriers.

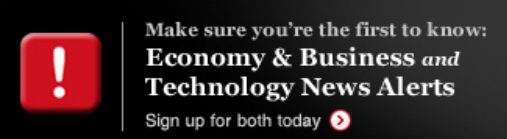
"Here we are, the most innovative country in the world, and yet there are other countries that have twice as many free-trade agreements. We get so caught up in the politics, business gets lost in the shuffle," he said.

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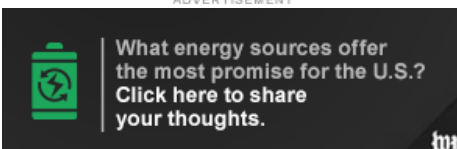
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	Index	Status	Last	Today's Change
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S&P 500 INDEX (CME)	closed	1,588.03	14.94	0.95%
NASDAQ COMP	open	3,367.85	19.96	0.60%