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The \$1 million man



By Lilla Zuill

A retailer serving Bermuda from the US caused a furore a decade ago when he moved into the local market, but ten years on Joshua Bate said he is still going strong and hit \$1 million in sales last year.

If anything Mr. Bate - the man behind Joshua Bate Trading - said negative sentiment and publicity levelled at him by Bermuda traders fuelled interest in his business and helped him build up his Bermuda client base.

And business has been good, so good that the Maine-based entrepreneur only deals with sales to the Island.

A run-in with local firms, including Holmes, Williams & Purvey (HWP), followed Mr. Bate's initial attempts to build a following with local customers.

Mr. Bate had first come in contact with Bermuda customers at the New Jersey Home Depot where he worked in the early 1990s. He subsequently decided to go out on his own with an import business to Bermuda.

Mr. Bate, who prides himself on being able to find just about anything - from computer cabling, trucks, and forklifts to refrigerators - for a lower price than the competition, subsequently took out an ad in *The Royal Gazette*.

But there was an outcry from local businesses which culminated in HWP placing an ad - actually, a Peter Woolcock cartoon - in *The Royal Gazette* that claimed Mr. Bate could not effectively service the goods he sold.

At the time, Mr. Bate said: "I love the ad as it acknowledges that I have Bermuda

clients.

"Several traders in Bermuda have done what they could to oppose me, but I don't feel threatened..." he said.

To counter HWP's claim, Mr. Bate said he does honour warranties and had built relationships with local repair men.

The budget importer sat tight and through his local agent - Robin Gray of Ornamental Imports in the Ornamental Ironworks building on Middle Road in Devonshire, who was incidentally his first on-island customer - has established a small warehouse space where he can now stock certain appliances and air conditioners that he sells.

Through the years Mr. Bate has won numerous Government contracts - he was the supplier of hundreds of containers to hold asbestos at a Government quarry after its removal from the old US Navy base - and claimed to have saved many local businesses and consumers their "hard-earned cash".

Speaking of selling to the Island, Mr. Bate recounted his most memorable day: "About five years ago, I sold the Government computer cable and a treadmill to a Bermudian woman, all in the space of one day," he said.

Even his former foes have backed off. HWP - under new management - said it welcomed the competition. The Group's president Jonathan Brewin said: "We congratulate Joshua on completion of ten years of successful service."

Mr. Brewin added that the market is now "global" and that if anything competition was a stimulus to drive competitive pricing, warranty policies and customer service.

One thing local consumers should bear in mind, Mr. Brewin said, is that certain appliances - such as refrigerators - brought in by HWP are designed specifically for tropical climates, and may not be available in the US market.

Mr. Brewin concluded that companies have a responsibility to exceed their customers' expectations.
