

Competing against Multinationals in Emerging Markets: Case Studies of SMEs in the Manufacturing Sector

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Published by Palgrave Pivot, Professor Densil A. Williams' book *Competing against Multinationals in Emerging Markets: Case Studies of SMEs in the Manufacturing Sector* is motivated by Jamaica National's initiative, "The Bold Ones: New Champions of Manufacturing". This book highlights the factors critical for small business survival in Caribbean manufacturing context. If your business costs are high because of high crime rate, high interest rates on the cost of capital, unstable exchange rates and high level of government bureaucracy and you want to know the secret of small manufacturing business survival in such environments, then this book will inspire you to face these hurdles successfully and motivate you to never give up.

The secret of survival, mentioned in this book, for such businesses revolves around networking with larger enterprises, brand building, intimate knowledge of your products and line of business, diversification of markets, meeting customer needs and forward thinking along with strategic leadership. However, what makes this book a wonderful read are the inspiring and instructive stories of the business owners who made it in such difficult circumstances. Narrative of business people is used as a methodological tool to convey their experience which is a unique and an interesting contribution in the context of Caribbean small manufacturing business research. This inspiring book is useful for policy makers who have the responsibility to formulate policies and facilitate the survival of small firms, small firm owners who want to build prosperous enterprise and business practitioners who provide training to the employees at small manufacturing firms.

This book has eight chapters. Inclusion of an index makes it easier to find various themes in the book. Bibliography is helpful if one wants to extend knowledge on the topics covered in this book. The first chapter sets the tone for the book, as the next six chapters elaborate on different manufacturing organizations in the Caribbean.

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter. This chapter explains some theories which lay a useful foundation for readers to understand how small firms can compete against multinational firms in the manufacturing sector in emerging economies and survive. The introductory chapter provides a great description of narrative as a research method that is used effectively throughout the book.



Students of international business, production and operations management, strategic management, entrepreneurship and supply chain management can benefit from this and forthcoming chapters. However, I want to mention here that this book is not a comprehensive review in any way. Therefore, if you understand basic economic concepts and the importance of strategic management and corporate governance in small business context, then you may enjoy this book more.

The grabbing part of the first chapter stresses the importance of having a strong network for small businesses, which I think is a great point and should not be overlooked by any reader. The selection of companies for case development is great and inspiring. The forthcoming chapters or cases are narratives of business owners where they explain how they developed their businesses while facing difficulties in an unsupportive Caribbean business environment. However, in the light of these narratives, the writer has suggested some common lessons (in final chapter), which can be used as “best practices”.

Chapter 2 is the case on Spur Tree Spices, which manufactures sauces and spices in Jamaica.

This case portrays a sense of personal determination of the owners trumping bureaucratic inefficiencies. I learned from this case that lack of academics should never deter you to work on your ideas and how important it is to have a good team.

Readers will learn from this case the importance of quality control and how training staff and completing certifications can help in maintaining quality of products. The narrative stressed the importance of self-belief in your product, as a small business owner, and diversification of market as you grow internationally (not just diaspora market but mainstream market).

Chapter 3 is the case on Yono Industries, which traces the development of a small detergent manufacturing plant in Jamaica.

The narrative highlights some of the problems this business faced, e.g. challenges of financing, access to high-quality workers, overcoming government bureaucracy, gaining consistent supplies from local market, high cost of electricity, increased competition from Chinese imports, unstable currency and high cost of security. However, these obstacles did not stop the business, and the owner transformed his business into success, despite these obstacles.

The case highlights how this business generated its electricity and purified water to use in the manufacturing process along with improving its ability to raise money as orders grew.

Furthermore, the case highlights that Jamaican policy makers do not understand the rudiments of doing business, so they design and implement policies that are inimical to the effective operations of businesses, especially small business. Therefore, starting and maintaining a business is difficult because of government policies and little support.

Chapter 4 is the case of Island Moldings, which is a small furniture manufacturing business in St. Kitts and Nevis.

The case is a narrative on faith and the belief that whatever happens, happens for the good. In this case, the owner highlights the importance of employees with right skills and proper training along with taking care of safety issues.

The challenges other small manufacturing operations in the Caribbean face are not present in St. Kitts and Nevis. In St. Kitts, banks are relatively supportive, governments are not overly bureaucratic and programs are developed nationally to help with training

of staff for various industries. That is why Island Moldings is now thinking more seriously about expansion and growth.

Chapter 5 is the case of a small company in Belize. The company is Hot Mama's which produces sauces and spices.

This case narrates an inspiring story of a business owner who never gave up despite being challenged with cancer, twice, and almost total loss of business.

The case highlights how this company is thinking to improve its market share in an environment where the local banking system is not very supportive, as the cost of borrowing from commercial banks is extremely high.

The case is inspiring for other small businesses, as Hot Mama's is always looking for bigger opportunities and expansion, despite being challenged on different levels.

Chapter 6 is the case on Perishables Jamaica Limited, a small firm which manufactures and sells tea locally and internationally from its home base in Jamaica.

What I liked most in this case was that the company is in the process of installing solar panels to generate energy for its operations.

Chapter 7 is the case on Caribbean Flavours and Fragrances, which produces and sells fragrances used in various food items. This business is based in Jamaica.

This inspiring case highlights the story of a history teacher who became a businessman because of owner's strategic leadership and foresight. The case reestablishes the significance of staff training and networking with larger businesses to get products into difficult export markets.

Chapter 8 is the final chapter highlighting conclusions and lessons learned which can be replicated in other small manufacturing firms.

The lessons are as follows:

- Network with larger enterprises and try to establish your business and social networks.
- Build your brand and make it known in the marketplace, as it is both necessary and critical for small business survival.
- Acquire intimate knowledge of products and line of business.
- Do not depend on single market. Always be on a lookout to diversify your market and meet your customers' need.
- In small companies, owner makes the final call, unlike big companies, where the board of directors has a say in the final decision. This requires operational foresight from small business owners. Therefore, develop strong strategic forward thinking and provide appropriate staff training.

One common theme is that all business owners were doing what they loved to do. They were passionate about their businesses.

Finally, the author mentions the need of improved corporate governance as small manufacturing business grows. Author also highlights the importance of an appropriate facility layout, as it would assist in cutting costs.

I found it easy to engage with this book and it inspired me. Read it if you have a business idea and you are looking for motivation. The book will also be immensely beneficial to the business education world.

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