



Barry Bogage, executive director of the Maryland/Israel Development Center: “[Israel is] a high tech-oriented country that is strong in the same industries as Maryland.” (Provided photo)

Across the Miles

A new Maryland/Israel Development Center program helps Israeli companies during the pandemic.

By Caryn R. Sagal

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, business — particularly global commerce — has been far from normal.

With international travel largely halted, companies are mostly relegated to conducting meetings via Zoom or WhatsApp. But those technological platforms may not be enough for closing deals or keeping in touch with overseas clients.

The Maryland/Israel Development Center recently launched the BizRepUSA program to help Israeli companies find qualified business development representatives and contacts in the U.S. marketplace while prevented from traveling during the pandemic.

A nonprofit, the MIDC is a public-private partnership of the Maryland Department of Commerce, the Israeli Ministry of Economy and Trade, and The Associated Jewish Federation of Baltimore.

Through the free BizRepUSA program, the MIDC will introduce Israeli executives and entrepreneurs to business development professionals with specific expertise in such fields as medical technology, digi-

tal health, bio-technology, environment, cybersecurity, information technology, homeland security and defense.

The MIDC will recruit and screen the business development representatives and post their profiles on its website for Israeli companies to review and select. Upon mutual consent, the MIDC will introduce the business development professionals and Israeli company executives to directly negotiate their own contractual arrangements regarding responsibilities, time and payment.

“With travel restrictions likely to continue in some form until a COVID-19 vaccine or treatment is developed, Israeli companies need to keep in front of their American customers,” Yifat Alon Perel, minister of economic and trade affairs at the Embassy of Israel in the U.S., said in a statement. “The MIDC’s BizRepUSA program will provide them representation in the U.S. market so they stay close to their customers until international travel fully resumes.”

Jmore recently spoke with **Barry Bogage**, who has served as MIDC’s exec-

utive director since its inception in 1992, about the new initiative.

How exactly does BizRepUSA work?

American business development professionals will send us their CV [curriculum vitae] or company’s statement of capabilities, and we’ll post it on our website. Israeli executives and entrepreneurs will review the profiles, tell us which ones are of interest, and send us their company profile and job description to show the American professionals.

Upon mutual consent, we will introduce the business development professionals and Israeli company executives to directly negotiate their own contractual arrangements regarding responsibilities, time and payment.

Once the companies sign up, how long does it typically take to make introductions? Very fast. It can be within days.

How many companies have been helped so far?

We’ve been recruiting throughout the summer. In September, we started announcing the program and listing it with economic development agencies.

Already, approximately 18 Maryland-based business development professionals have signed up and we’re just starting to hear from Israeli entrepreneurs.

What’s the overall mission of the MIDC?

We help Israeli companies optimize their U.S. market entry strategy, find customers, distributors and collaborators and open an American office. This involves everything from structuring the company to finding a facility to staffing the office. We help American companies export to Israel by finding customers, distributors and partners. We also provide introductions to freight forwarders and customs brokers, banks for letters of credit and other international trade service providers. And we can find innovators and entrepreneurs with complementary technologies to enhance their existing product line.

Why is Maryland attractive to Israelis?

Maryland has one of the most educated and affluent populations in the country. We’re very scientific- and technology-ori-

ented due to the number of federal labs here, as well as Johns Hopkins and the University of Maryland. With all this scientific talent, there are a lot of advanced technology companies here, and there's a big market here for the kinds of products made in Israel such as medical technology, biotech, cybersecurity and defense.

Why should Maryland companies do business with Israel? Known as "The Start-Up Nation," Israel is a globally recognized hub of technological innovation. It's a high tech-oriented country that is strong in the same industries as Maryland.

What challenges has COVID-19 presented? Our primary goal is to help Israeli companies open offices and factories in Maryland, but businesses currently are delaying those decisions due to the COVID pandemic.

For Israeli entrepreneurs, that usually means extensive travel for face-to-face meetings to cultivate potential clients about the value of their new technology and viability of their start-up company. They are now limited to virtual meetings, but need professional representation in the U.S. market.

And for Israeli businesses already doing business here, they cannot disappear from the American market. They must stay in contact with their customers, investors, suppliers, partners and prospects.

How is MIDC assisting? We recently held webinars on "Israeli COVID Testing and Tracing Solutions" and "How to Stay in Touch with Your American Customers during the Coronavirus Pandemic."

Next, we'll host "International Cyber security Partners and Perspectives — Israel and Maryland" on Oct. 22 and "Israel in the Shadow of COVID-19: Just the Facts" on Nov. 17.

We're also planning to host one later in the year on the new landscape for venture capital investing. ①

For information, visit marylandisrael.org.

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