

[Bos Brothers: Building Export Success in New Brunswick](#)

- Jan 18, 2016 BY [Jason Boies](#)



This week sees the arrival of the annual International Builders' Show ([IBS](#)) in Las Vegas. IBS is the largest annual light construction industry event in the world, bringing approximately 50,000 visitors to Nevada from more than 100 nations.

Among those visitors this year will be a group of New Brunswick-based businesses including [Bos Brothers](#), a small manufacturer based in the rural community of Monteaugle.

As a North American leader in forest management, New Brunswick has first and second growth forest covering 85% of the landscape. It's not surprising then that New Brunswick companies—like Bos Brothers—produce a wide variety of manufactured and engineered specialty wood products for international markets.

On the eve of their IBS experience, Opportunities NB (ONB) spoke with Karim Bhibah, President, to learn more about the company, his thoughts on entrepreneurship, and the benefits of doing business in New Brunswick's value-added wood sector.

ONB: Let's start with an overview of Bos Brothers and what you offer?

Bhibah: *Bos Brothers began operations in 2002, and we're a manufacturer of [high-quality cabinet doors](#). We make our doors from hardwoods including birch, maple, oak, ash, mahogany, and other exotic species. We manufacture mainly in New Brunswick and sell primarily to Atlantic Canada and New England in the US. We are looking to become more aggressive in terms of exporting beyond the province, however. We've been fairly active in the last year on that front, and it's top-of-mind as we head to Las Vegas.*



ONB: You've worked with the ONB team on [export development](#). Tell us about that.

Bhibah: *Yes, the company hadn't seen much in sales outside [the Maritimes](#) until recently. When I took over with a new management team, we placed strong focus on exporting outside the region. I certainly credit the province—via ONB—who have assisted us in many ways. I've been lucky enough to be a part of [trade missions](#) with your team which were quite fruitful.*

Since those initial excursions I've gone on a few more with our general manager. This has all led to increased sales in the eastern part of the United States. We're very happy with the amount of product we've moved into the US thus far.

ONB: What have been the most significant challenges you've faced to get to this point, and how were those challenges overcome?

Bhibah: *The biggest challenge has simply been collecting the resources needed to really sink our teeth into export development; that type of thing needs real commitment and persistence. Companies in our stage of growth do not have the resources of other larger, more mature businesses. They're more financially stable and can manage to go a year or two without seeing real profits materialize from new markets.*

*It takes a lot of relationship building to get going. So the main hurdle was just having all the necessary contacts and resources, including financial resources, to get started on an ambitious export strategy. We've simply pushed through it with persistence and the pieces have fallen into place. **It helps to set realistic goals at the outset.***

ONB: Let's talk about the IBS show this week. What's your focus as you head to Las Vegas? What are you hoping to accomplish?

Bhibah: *We're exhibiting at the show for the second time. This is one of those great opportunities we likely could not afford to participate in were it not for the assistance of the provincial delegation and the Canadian Pavilion. We're aiming to establish a stronger network of relationships down south and identify solid leads.*

In a perfect world you come away from an event like this with actual purchase orders, but that's not the reality. It's about building those relationships and following up when you're back home; that's when sales happen. We're heading in optimistic, however, and looking to build on what we learned last year where we connected with good leads that turned into customers. I think we learned a lot the first time through and now have a better plan of attack; this year we're much more prepared to follow up quickly.

ONB: The show has numerous education sessions, and seems like a great opportunity to spot new trends in the industry.

Bhibah: *Yes, and we plan to take as much as we can from the event. It's such a huge show with so much to see and learn. Like you said, it's the ideal place to learn about new trends and find out what's hot or will be hot. We're not able to take it all in since we're a small team and need to man our booth, but it's a great opportunity to learn as much as it is to seek new business.*

As an example, from last year we learned that in some larger centres the trends were leaning towards vinyl-wrapped doors and vinyl-wrapped kitchens, as opposed to wood kitchens which are more dominant here in Atlantic Canada. Based on that intelligence we were able to gear up for those trends; we're in the midst of getting that line into full swing, and investing more in equipment for it.

So yes, it's a good chance to see what's coming and get out in front of trends. There's real value beyond exhibiting and meeting people.

ONB: Let's shift gears to talk about your background. Are you from New Brunswick originally?

Bhibah: *I'm a New Brunswicker but I'm not from here originally, no. I ended up in Canada after attending a university fair in Tunisia, where I'm from. I came here in 2004, and did my MBA at the University of Moncton. I've been fortunate enough to build a solid network of friends here even before really getting into the business world. I managed to reach some fairly high management positions before finally going out on my own. I've spent the bulk of my career in this industry.*

ONB: You just became part of the [Wallace McCain Institute's Entrepreneurial Leaders Program \(ELP\)](#). Tell us about that experience.

Bhibah: *The Wallace McCain Institute is one of the icons of business leadership in Atlantic Canada. Despite being fairly new in the grand scheme, it's had real impact in terms of developing leaders in this region. I'm lucky and proud to be part of that program. It's a stringent process; plenty of people apply and only 16 made it to this latest group (ELP8).*

We're a diverse mix of business people, operating companies with anywhere from three to over 500 employees. Between the 16 of us we touch 42 companies with over a 1,000 employees generating over 100 million dollars in business per year. We have a wide variety of business and life experiences between us, as well as our own challenges that can be shared with the group. We try to develop each other through peer coaching, exchanging expertise, and honing our existing skillsets.

The program really develops the leadership judgement of the people involved so that's what I've really been aiming for. I'm midway through the program now and it's been a fantastic experience, and I'm looking forward to a lifelong commitment. When you become part of this program you are part of the Order of Wallace McCain Institute for a lifetime.

ONB: What would you consider the benefits of both living and working in New Brunswick?

Bhibah: *I didn't know a thing about Moncton or New Brunswick before that university fair I mentioned. I had to do a lot of research on my own; I was impressed with this place. **Even knowing it wasn't a large Canadian centre, I could see there was real opportunity here.***

*When I arrived it was strictly for the education, not the quality of life. I focused on my MBA but from there I was obviously exposed to New Brunswick life in general. I also left for a time and lived in Montreal, getting to see a good amount of Quebec in the process. **Having now been outside the province, I must say I've come to really appreciate Moncton and Atlantic Canada, and its quality of life.** When I say quality of life, I don't wish to suggest it's a slow pace here, as some may assume. It's not, particularly in the business world; on that side it's as fast-paced as anywhere. What I mean is you have access to pretty much anything you want: high quality business environments, manufacturing*

facilities, IT infrastructure, real estate, law and accounting firms, pretty much anything you'd need to get a business off the ground.

You're a quick flight from major business centres; I've flown to Montreal in a morning and flown right back that evening. We're also lucky to have low crime rates here in New Brunswick, and a ton of options for outdoor activities. I like the work-life balance here in Moncton. We have a great environment for businesses to grow, and not enough people—outside the province or in—know that.

ONB: Let's wrap up with your best piece of advice for aspiring entrepreneurs in the region?

Bhibah: *I'll start with a cliché, but it's cliché because it's true: believe in yourself and believe you can accomplish your goals. **There will be a lot of noise and naysayers. You need to block that noise, believe in yourself, and look at examples in this region.** There are business icons in this province that operate on a huge scale, success can happen here. Your success will not hinge on where you are, it will hinge on what you want to accomplish.*