

Cultural knowledge helps Hartsville company profit internationally



Photo/Dennis Quick

Jerry Ellison, president and founder of Hartsville-based JBE Inc., says the South Carolina World Trade Center helped his company do business in India.

By Dennis Quick
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When discussing business in India, head movements mean a lot.

Fortunately, Jerry Ellison knew this cultural idiosyncrasy before he and his associates at JBE Inc. in Hartsville ventured to India to score a business deal in July 2005.

"Indians tend to move their heads one way if they like what you're saying and another way if they don't," says Ellison, president and founder of JBE, a family-owned company that performs subassembly, warehousing and inventory-management services for manufacturers such as Honda of South Carolina, BMW, Robert Bosch Corp., A.O. Smith Corp., Black & Decker and Cummins Turbo Technologies.

Even if a smile appears to indicate that Indian negotiators like what is being said, it's the subtle head movement that tells how they really feel, Ellison adds. If the head moves quickly in circular motion, that means the negotiator disagrees with or doesn't like what you're saying. If the head moves in a slow, circular motion, the negotiator is more agreeable to the deal.

Cummins Turbo Technologies, which is based in England, has a manufacturing plant in central India. After being tutored by World Trade Center representatives, Ellison and his team went to India to convince the plant's officials to ship turbocharger parts to JBE so JBE could put them together and ship the subassemblies to Holset Turbochargers in Charleston.