

# SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER SUCCESS STORY

## ZPOWER, LLC

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### BEFORE:

An industry leader in rechargeable battery technology, ZPower developed a proprietary, patent-protected silver-zinc rechargeable microbattery that revolutionized the hearing industry. Nearly every major hearing-aid manufacturer now offers select products with ZPower rechargeable batteries.

These microbatteries can be fully recharged hundreds of times without losing significant energy capacity, meaning they're perfect for hearing aids, medical devices and for wearable and portable electronics. They are also recyclable which is a significant improvement over lithium-ion batteries, which can only be "downcycled" into lower quality materials.

While successfully selling within the United States, ZPower wanted to diversify into the global marketplace to reach its goals for growth and sustainability. Targeting the European Union, ZPower President and CEO Ross Dueber, Ph.D., contacted the Small Business Development Center in 2015 for guidance on medical device and CE registration requirements.

### DURING:

Dr. Dueber worked with an SBDC consultant who provided assistance on the compliance requirements for the products to be sold internationally and was a resource for vital information that helped the company streamline the process of selling into the European Union. SBDC's expertise in international trade enabled ZPower to avoid the time-consuming and potentially expensive pitfalls of introducing products into the international market. With the SBDC and the consultant's guidance, ZPower was able to identify the best path for selling internationally in a timely and effective manner.

### AFTER:

The year 2017 has been a banner one for the privately-held company as it reached several milestones: The company started the year by becoming ISO 13485-certified, made its first international shipments and launched eight hearing-aid products. Its Q2 sales increased approximately 300% over the previous quarter, and the number of employees increased 70% in less than a year.

In the future, ZPower's goals are to shift the hearing-aid market to its rechargeable battery, which would be a change from the industry's current paradigm that focuses on disposable batteries, and to expand into consumer and medical device markets.



### LESSONS LEARNED:

- **Get Guidance**  
"The best single advice from the SBDC was to hire an expert consultant to guide us," said Dueber. They followed the advice, and it's working: 2017 is on track to be the best sales year to date.
- **Global Complexities**  
Because different countries have different regulations, medical device products like ZPower's cannot be exported as-is. So understanding the market and its requirements before entering it is an important step. "The SBDC provided us with a good understanding and appreciation of the complexity of global medical device regulations and requirements," Dueber said.
- **Environmental Stewardship**  
ZPower innovates all its microbattery products using recyclable components so they are environmentally sustainable, which is very important in the domestic and international marketplace. The company's commitment to sustainable innovation is at the core of who they are and instills the values that will continue to guide the company.



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