

Jerry Ogle of Ogle & Co., in Sarasota

By Dana Sanchez, *The Bradenton Herald* [1/4/2004]

Jerry Ogle has identified a niche in the world of international tax planning, a world usually dominated by four global accounting firms with hefty hourly rates that only the largest companies can justify.

Together with CPA John Owen, Ogle has built a boutique tax advising firm, providing international tax planning for mid-size businesses that don't have in-house tax capabilities.

After working independently but synergistically in the Kaiser Building near University Boulevard, the two accountants announced Dec. 29 that Owen will join Ogle's company as a partner. A third partner in the firm is Arif Shurdho, an attorney.

Ogle specializes in international tax issues, Owen in domestic. Together, they advise foreigners who want to start businesses in the United States or domestic companies expanding into foreign markets.

Joining makes for a good strategic alliance, Owen said.

The partners recently helped Alex and Kirsty Del Prete expand their French crockery business into the United States. The Del Pretes opened Varages, named after a village in Provence, at the Ellenton Prime Outlets in November. Ogle and Owens helped them with paperwork, took them to the IRS office to get a taxpayer identification number and helped them apply for Social Security numbers.

"For the foreigner who's trying to get set up, it's extremely difficult," said Kirsty Del Prete. "It seems like everyone is making up their own rules."

The couple described the advice they received as a godsend.

Low overhead and the small size of his firm -- three full-time employees -- allow Ogle to service smaller businesses, charging less than half the hourly rates that larger firms do. Smaller companies looking to get into exports usually are limited to small local accounting firms that offer tax compliance advice, but may not offer international tax planning, Ogle said.

"As a result, many mid-sized businesses have higher global income tax rates when compared to larger companies with more sophisticated advisors," Ogle said.

For companies trying to get into the export business, early tax planning pays dividends down the road, Ogle said.

"International tax planning is multi-jurisdictional," Ogle said. "Moving an established company to a lower-taxed jurisdiction can be costly."

Companies generally want their profits taxed in the lowest-taxed countries. The Cayman Islands, for example, has a zero percent income tax. The U.S. federal income tax rate for companies is 35 percent.

As his largest client, PepsiCo occupies most of the 31-year-old Ogle's time, but Ogle & Co. has another 20 corporate clients and 30 to 40 individual clients. Ogle has testified before the Mexican congress on Tropicana's behalf.

After earning a master's degree in taxation from the University of South Florida, Ogle worked for Deloitte & Touche in Tampa for three years with PepsiCo as his primary client.

Recruited full time by PepsiCo, Ogle helped the company with due diligence in tax issues before opening his own firm, taking PepsiCo with him.

The decision to strike out on his own was a bold one, but Ogle has identified an interesting niche by making his expertise available to smaller companies, said Chuck Mueller, director of state and local taxes for PepsiCo Inc. in New York.

"There's a degree of safety or certainty that comes from having a full-time job," Mueller said. "He made a very bold decision to step out on his own without a safety net."

Ogle does international tax planning for Tropicana. The juice manufacturer has global interests including Canada, Mexico, Europe, Asia and the Caribbean. A large part of Ogle's work involves transfer pricing, "a very big issue that few people around here can do," Ogle said.

Transfer pricing involves setting prices on products and services for inter-company transactions.

Ogle's strong point is common sense, Mueller said.

"Common sense is a very valuable tool to go along with technical expertise."

The four big accounting firms of Deloitte & Touche, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst & Young and KPMG Pete Marwick, all with offices in Tampa, are not exactly competition.

"We're not big enough to make a dent in their market," Ogle said.

Ogle nevertheless undercuts the rates of the big four accounting firms by charging \$200 an hour for work that generally commands \$300 to \$600, he said.

"Part of my model was premised around being able to do for \$200,000 what a big company could do for \$600,000 to a million," he said. "I'm a middle ground."

In some cases, Ogle has reduced companies' global income tax rates by 5 to 10 percent.

With very few local clients, Ogle services companies in Costa Rica, Europe and the United States. He does tax planning for thoroughbred horse owners.

Steven Meitzen is vice president and chief marketing officer of Business Communication Services in Tarpon Springs. He exports new and used telephone equipment, cable and fiber optics. With Ogle's help, Meitzen said he learned how to limit his tax liability, increase market share and move money back into the United States.

"Jerry's guidance and advice has opened the door to doing exporting," Meitzen said. "He's probably one of the smartest guys I've met in the accounting world."

As president of the Tampa Bay Manufacturers Association, Meitzen invited Ogle to address members on international tax issues.

"He presents it in such a good way for non-technical folks," Meitzen said.

Steve Richardson owns Andrew Michael Investigations, a private investigation firm specializing in nursing home abuse with 40 employees nationwide and central offices in Tampa. His company doesn't deal with international taxes, Richardson said, but he uses Ogle because he's good.

"We don't usually have too many nice things to say about tax people, but he's an exception," Richardson said. "It was just luck of the draw. I called him. It was out of his specialty, but he was interested in what we do, and we formed a friendship right off the bat. He's very reasonable for his expertise."