



# The Partner

BUILDING BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

# 100,000 Opportunities for Partnership

## forum Events

### **Innovative Methodology**

Collaborative relationships depend to a great deal upon meeting the right people. In the last thirteen years business to business event organisers Forum Events have made a remarkable 100,000 introductions between organisations from all sectors of the business world. Using an innovative methodology that has been refined and developed through more than 150 events, nearly 8,000 buyers have been introduced to around 4,000 different suppliers to explore opportunities for working together.

This pioneering approach to doing business was the brainchild of business founder Paul Rowney who was publishing a trade magazine in the Direct Marketing industry at the time as well as organising various seminars and exhibitions. He listened to his customers discussing the inefficiency of traditional exhibitions and the high expense of alternative off-shore marketing conferences and knew that he could run a networking event closer to home at a fraction of the cost. He believed that he could improve on the model by matching the interests of buyers and suppliers in advance thus ensuring that people only meet those who have a genuine interest in each other's business

The first event was held in 1996 aimed at the Direct Marketing sector and was an immediate success. Five more events were held the following year adding Facilities Management, Security, Logistics and Care Homes to the programme. That steady growth has continued to the present day with 23 events planned for 2009 addressing a diverse audience from sectors such as Call Centres, Education, Event Organisation, Hotels, Interiors, Retail and Risk Management. Other events are focused on functions rather than sectors and these include Sustainability, HR, Marketing, Training and Human Resources.

The formula has been such a success in the UK that Rowney has now established the same model in America running 10 events in the last two years with eight more planned for 2009. The USA business already has 14 staff with a turnover in excess of \$1.5m while the UK team boast sales in excess of £2.5m and a staff of 30 experienced event organisers producing targeted events that connect like-minded buyers and suppliers.

### **Industry Recognition**

The end products, called Forums or Summits, are far more than speed-dating conventions for professional buyers and suppliers. They have evolved into a series of comprehensive business networking conferences with educational, commercial and social activity programmes. Some have become established as significant events in their industries' annual calendar attracting leading figures to address the participants in keynote addresses because of the seniority of the audience and the media attention that naturally follows.

These notable guests have included industry spokesmen such as Sir Michael Latham, Sir Digby Jones, PY Gerbeau and James Woodhuysen as well as public figures including Stella Rimington, John Stalker, Andrew Sachs, Denis Healy, Jeffrey Archer and Ken Livingstone. The conference agendas also include educational seminars and discussion groups hosted by subject experts and supported by relevant Professional Institutes and Associations.





*The Forum Events team*

Rowney is not deterred by the speed-dating analogy, pointing to his strategic focus on relationship driven procurement. *"We are the 'dateline' of the business world. People still buy from people. Our events are in sectors where that interaction needs to take place. That's why we don't run events in sectors like office stationery where ordering pens and pencils can be done without seeing anyone."*

Much of the success of the Forums stems from the diligent preparation and planning carried out by the Forum Events team to carefully match clients and suppliers and to ensure that the conference content and business agenda takes full account of all stakeholders concerns and requirements while reflecting current issues and market trends. Every buyer is carefully questioned to identify their purchasing needs and suppliers are then sourced that can deliver those requirements and offer additional professional solutions.

### **Excellent Feedback**

This thorough preparation certainly pays off for the suppliers. With over 60% continually rebooking there is no doubt that the connections made and relationships established through the Forum process are regularly converted into valuable business partnerships. A spokesman for Taylor Woodrow says: *"We have attended several*

*Forums, but the most successful to date was the Total FM Summit where one of the meetings started a relationship which has recently resulted in the award of a contract worth in excess of £45m".*

Many of the supply companies involved are major players like Interserve, Compass and TNT, but the model works just as well for businesses from both ends of the small and medium enterprise sector. Paul Toft, Business Development Director of Consolidated Services who provide move management, furniture installation and storage services, says *"These are excellent events where we have made some high quality contacts. At least 80% of the people we have met have fitted our target customer profile."*

Buyers are discouraged from re-attending a particular forum until they have completely new purchasing requirements. However many of them are so positive about the way the events work that they recommend the formula to buyers of other services from within their business. Thus many large organisations like BT, Vodafone, Merrill Lynch and BAE Systems have attended a number of different Forums over the years. Some buyers make regular returns to the Forum after they have moved to new employers because they are confident that they will be able to identify new and valuable contacts.



Speaking at a recent event, Sarah Fisher from Scottish Water said *"This is our second visit and I came here with some very specific needs. I have met people at the Forum that I know I will do business with in the near future. The Forum team had done all the leg work for me so that I only met the right people. It has been succinct and businesslike and I've got what I wanted with no hard sell, just honest conversations."*

## 100,000 Opportunities for Partnership continued...

The feedback from Forum participants is carefully measured after each event to ensure that the focus on continuous improvement is maintained. The scores are remarkably consistent and positive. Asked if the most recent event had been useful or very useful more than 97% of attendees agreed while 70% of delegates and 87% of service providers attending stated that they had met people at the Forum that they expected to do business with in the near future.

### **Facilitating Effective Business Relationships**

Rowney is in no doubt as to the reason for the model's success: *"This succeeds because at the risk of sounding trite, it works for both buyers and suppliers. Even with the Internet and all the technology at our disposal, people who are buying high ticket, complicated or complex products and services need to meet face to face. For suppliers and buyers this is a very efficient way of fulfilling that need."*

Graham Price, who organises the highly successful Facilities Management Forum is justifiably proud of what has been achieved by the Forum Events team: *"Each event can involve as many as 700 face to face meetings which add up to more than 100,000 since we started. Getting that right takes considerable time and effort but the satisfaction of knowing that we are providing a service that benefits 1000's of business people a year makes it all worthwhile."*

Thirteen years of dedication to facilitating effective business relationships has established Forum Events as one of the UK's leading business-to-business event organisers. This has been recognised by the event management industry with the granting of the Best New Business Exhibition Award by the Association of Exhibition Organisers. Rowney believes that traditional exhibitions have limited current appeal: *"Nowadays people rarely enjoy going to a trade show as an exhibitor or as*

*a visitor. Our research shows that senior executives increasingly avoid them, so how else are suppliers supposed to meet them? The Forum setting is a much better environment to meet and do business".*

The success of the Forum Events formula highlights the benefit of careful planning and assessment before selecting partners for collaborative working. Scattergun sourcing processes are extremely unreliable leading to haphazard results, increased costs and longer lead times. The pre-Forum process filters out unsuitable partners and highlights those who have the capacity and competency required, creating a shortlist for detailed investigation.

During the introductory appointment at the Forum buyers are able to assess a suppliers' track record considering their achievements, quality systems, innovation, business strategy and attitude to change. These are essential steps in the process to identify partnership potential. Relationships established at the Forums over the last thirteen years are being developed over time into rewarding business associations that add value to all parties involved.

The Forum formula has facilitated the creation of many successful business relationships. Other organisations are already imitating the approach which is a clear demonstration of its importance in the current market. As the economic downturn continues to impact on organisations from all sectors the need for suppliers to identify the right customers and focus their attention on them is paramount. The methodology developed by Forum Events is a proven short cut to partner selection.

For further information on joining a Forum event, visit:

[www.forumevents.co.uk](http://www.forumevents.co.uk)

or call 01992 374100

[www.forumnetworkingevents.com](http://www.forumnetworkingevents.com)

or call 00 1 941 925 7585