



## Business Partnerships: Making your partner money

**SPEAKER:** Stanley Bremer, Director, Wereldmuseum (The Netherlands)

Stanley Bremer worked as a graphic designer before studying museology at the University of Leiden. He co-founded the project firm of Meeter and Bremer before becoming director of the Wereldmuseum in 2001. His focus has always been the search for a balance between public and private co-operation.

[www.wereldmuseum.nl](http://www.wereldmuseum.nl)

**CHAIR:** Ann Wilson, Sales Director, Historic Royal Palaces (UK)

Historic Royal Palaces is the independent charity that looks after the Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, the Banqueting House, Kensington Palace and Kew Palace. For the past 10 years, Anne Wilson has worked as Sales Director, responsible for third party sales for visitors to the palaces and corporate events.

[www.hrp.org.uk](http://www.hrp.org.uk)



### CASE STUDY NOTES:

Stanley Bremer described the very successful partnership between the Wereldmuseum, an ethnographic museum, and Kras SterVakanties (KS), one of the Netherlands' largest travel agencies.

#### An unusual partnership

Stanley Bremer reasoned that people who travel for pleasure tend to be interested in other cultures and are potential visitors to an ethnographic museum like the Wereldmuseum. A partnership between the museum and a travel agency seemed to offer mutual benefit and he therefore approached KS.

The partnership, which is long-term, includes coordinating the content of temporary exhibitions with the travel agency's marketing objectives e.g. an exhibition on China to promote travel to China. This was very controversial because it was seen by some to be 'selling out to commercialism.' However it could just as easily be viewed as responding to what people are interested in i.e. more and more people are visiting China, so it makes sense to respond by developing an exhibition about the country and culture.

Also controversial was the setting up of an outlet for the travel agency within the museum itself. This both brought new visitors to the museum and gave regular visitors an opportunity to think about visiting places they'd learned about through the museum.

#### Mutual benefit

The travel agency buys 50,000 museum tickets each year to give to its customers, so that people buying cultural holidays can visit the museum to learn about the place to which they are going. It also hosts special evenings and weekends at the museum. In these ways, the travel agency can give an added service to its customers, which brings competitive advantage. Equally the museum benefits from increased numbers of new visitors e.g. there were over 4000 visitors to a special China weekend.

Visitors to the museum can win cultural holidays, which provide another incentive to visit the museum. They are also excellent promotion for the travel agency.

Results for both partners have been excellent. Overall visitor numbers to the museum were up from 55,000 in 2001 to 95,000 in 2005. And the tourist agency 'shop' in the museum is the best performing of the three agency outlets in Rotterdam, so successful that the travel agency has been able to save money by closing two of its less successful outlets.

The partnership has also been very valuable in terms of building staff pride in both organisations: For the travel agency staff because of the link with culture and for the museum staff because of the link with commercial success.

### **The problems**

Soon after the partnership agreement was signed, the travel industry faced a number of set-backs globally - the attacks in 2001 in New York, the SARS outbreak, the war in Iraq – which led to fewer people wanting to travel. On another occasion, controversy over wording in an exhibition about Tibet, led to an incident with the Chinese Embassy, which held up visa applications (for the travel agency customers). So the partnership has had ups and downs, which has made it all the more important to have a long-term vision and to continue to communicate openly and regularly.

### **Looking to the future**

Increased income (as a result of the partnership) means that there are plans to open the museum from 11am – 11pm. Also the kitchen will be expanded in partnership with restaurants to offer food which complements the themes of the exhibition. So for the 'Tibet and the 14 Dalai Lamas', visitors can enjoy typical Tibetan dishes like Thenthuk, Ping Alla and Chasha Katsa.

The success of this innovative partnership has also encouraged approaches from other companies e.g. Tiscali and Hewlett Packard would like to work with the museum to develop hand-held PDAs (Personal Digital Assistant) so that visitors can access different or more detailed information while in the museum - and even hire the PDA while on holiday. The idea would be that as someone passes a site of interest, the PDA provides information, sourced from the museum. Good for the traveller (and travel agency), good for the museum and good for the technology providers.

There has been some criticism that these partnerships compromise the integrity of the museum. However Stanley Bremer's point of view is that the quality of the content remains of the highest quality, it is only opening up the ways in which different types of audience access the information. His advice is to think big!