

**Child's play:
Andy and Karen's
nursery products
do good business
in North America**



The facts

The UK Opportunity Grant programme, organised by British Airways and promoted in conjunction with *The Daily Telegraph*, offered dynamic SMEs prizes of first class travel for a year to help their business compete for overseas work.

Launched last year and judged by a panel of partners in the scheme, the programme gave 12 return Business Class tickets to 100 companies who could demonstrate that face-to-face meetings with potential clients or suppliers overseas would help take their businesses to the next stage.

Entrants were required to explain their brief history and size and scope of current operations and to detail what could be achieved by face-to-face meetings that would not be otherwise possible.

More than 4,500 companies entered the competition; the winners are now at various stages of using their travel prizes – and beginning to reap the rewards.

When seeing is believing

*Personal contact can make all the difference, says **Andrew Cave***

Nursery products start-up Olli & Lime quickly found that a large proportion of its online orders were coming from the US – creating a management issue as well as an opportunity.

The firm, set up in 2008 by marketing director Andy Lacey and his wife Karen, the creative director, was able to expand by recruiting distributors and retail outlets, but, until recently, many of these contacts had never been met face-to-face.

British Airways' UK Opportunity Grant programme has changed all that. Cheltenham-based Ollie & Lime was selected

as one of the winners earlier this year, and Andy and Karen have been using the prize of 12 return Business Class flights to full effect. "About 80pc of our business is from North America, but we started with a scarce budget and resources," says Andy, 36.

"This is why the Opportunity Grant has been ideal for us."

The couple's first flight to Boston yielded good results: a meeting with a new contact was followed by an agreement for a distribution deal from a serviced warehouse in Mamaroneck, New York State.

They then flew to the West Coast – where they already had agents in Vancouver, Canada, and Portland, Oregon – and to a retail outlet stocking their products in Seattle.

"We wanted to meet them because all our contact has been through email and phone calls," says Andy.

"We wanted to see our products in the stores and talk to the people there. It has proved really useful. We went to one store where they had a whole display of our products. It gave us lots of ideas."

The couple took their third flight last month to

the New York International Gift Fair, and are planning trips to the ABC Kids Expo in Las Vegas and to Australia, where they are hoping to clinch more business.

"The Vegas show is absolutely huge and something we could never have done without the award," says Andy, who has been recording the visits on his blog at www.ollilandlimeblog.com.

"In Australia, there's a good chance that our distributor will take more stock. It's really important to be able to see people at first hand."

Find out why face-to-face is a better way to do business at telegraph.co.uk/ba