

Copper-bottomed collaboration

Andrew Cave hears how an Opportunity Grant helped bring in business

Aura Metals' business as a metal trader requires it to deal with suppliers and customers all over the world.

But, until the firm was chosen as a winner in British Airways' Opportunity Grant competition, very few were visited in person, says director Anders Axson.

Now, after securing the luxurious prize of 12 business class return tickets, the London company has reaped the benefits on its very first trip, a visit to China in April.

As a direct result, Aura Metals received an order for art bronze, which will be made into sculptures in Shanghai by American artist Peter Woytuk and installed as a permanent fixture in New York.

The metal for the order was then bought from a supplier in Slovakia and shipping arranged.

Aura has since been asked to quote for another delivery, and to be the firm's primary provider of art bronze and any other imported metal.

"There were other people interested in getting the business, but I was the only one who was prepared to go there and see them," says Mr Axson, 36.

Aura's technical director, Dave Willis, was also sent to Brazil where he sold a piece of machinery.

Mr Axson is planning a trip to see a metals manufacturer in Philadelphia, while a scheduled visit to Japan in November to see a metals importer and exporter should be followed by flights to Argentina and Uruguay later this year, and South Africa early in 2011.

"This is a really valuable prize," he says, "but its value to the business is much more than just money.

Metal guru: Anders Axson has more trips planned



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"Our business is arbitrage, so it's all about dealing in markets, hedging and dealing in currency exchange.

"But, ultimately, it's a very personable business. It's all about people and having relationships with them, and this prize is giving us a great chance to be able to go and meet people.

"Foreign trips always pay for themselves, even if you don't do business first time. They create trust, especially in Southeast Asia where cultures are so different.

"We are a small family business with three or four employees. We would never have been able to do this otherwise."

The facts

The Opportunity Grant programme, organised by British Airways and promoted in conjunction with *The Daily Telegraph*, offered dynamic and enterprising small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) prizes of business class travel for a year to help their business compete for overseas work.

Launched last year and judged by a panel of industry experts and partners, the programme provided 12 return business class tickets to a total 100 SMEs who were able to adequately demonstrate that face-to-face meetings with potential clients or suppliers overseas would help take their businesses to the next stage.

All the entrants were required to explain their brief history and the size and scope of current operations, and to detail what could be achieved by face-to-face meetings enabled by business travel that would not be possible for their businesses otherwise.

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

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