

Business MATCHMAKING



A Cooperative Agreement between SBA and HP Small Business Foundation

Sturtevant Partners

Houston, TX

A Houstonian since 1977, as a young adult John Sturtevant wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his life, and delayed entry to college until he was 24. "Even then, I wasn't sure what I wanted to be, other than that I didn't want to be an accountant," the successful writer says today.

Enrolling at The University of St. Thomas in Houston, he studied fine arts, theater and philosophy, eventually using his education in a job at Stages Theater. It wasn't a major step from working with actors, directors and writers to begin acting in industrial videos, but Sturtevant soon found himself producing, and later writing them.

Theater soon led to a career as a free-lance writer and the formation of Sturtevant Partners, where he worked on anything a client might need crafted at a keyboard. Today the entrepreneurial Sturtevant concentrates on advertising, marketing and writing, handling everything from annual reports and employee orientation programs to websites and direct mail pieces. He markets himself for his "strategic thinking and writing," and calls on other professional consultants in the field when a project requires resources beyond his scope.

And, oh yes, he also managed to fit in a five-year stint teaching a business writing course at Harvard Business School and another year at the European School of Economics along the way. This byway on his career path came about when a friend familiar with his work introduced him to the Harvard opportunity, which Sturtevant accepted even though he had no idea what a writing course for graduate students should look like. Ever the consulting entrepreneur, he picked brains and gathered thoughts from friends, colleagues, and his own experiences to create a course focused on analytical thinking and persuasive writing rather than nuts and bolts of grammar and punctuation.

"Out of that semester-long course I created the four-hour writing workshop I'm using today, and that's what led to some new business at the Business Matchmaking event," he said.

Unscheduled Business Matchmaking Appointment Yields Results

"I learned about the Houston Business Matchmaking event during a phone conversation with a friend, and decided to explore it by going to the website. From there, I made a couple of telephone calls but was told the event was filled up and there were no scholarships available," Sturtevant recalls. "Still, I persisted, and was given contact numbers for both HP and the Small Business Administration (SBA)."

To Sturtevant's surprise, he'd been given the direct telephone numbers for some of the top people at both organizations, and the response was prompt and positive, leading to his participation at the Houston event.

Business Matchmaking events are sponsored by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and Hewlett-Packard, bringing government and top industry buyers together with small businesses with goods and services to offer. Like a half-dozen other Business Matchmaking events held throughout the country earlier in the year, the December 2003 Houston event featured 15-minute one-on-one appointments with government and corporate procurement officials with bona fide procurement needs, along with networking and educational sessions.

At the Houston event, Sturtevant was scheduled for five one-on-one appointments with buyers potentially interested in his services. Once again displaying his creative spirit, he managed to gain another 15 unscheduled appointments simply by watching for interview locations vacant of sellers who had failed to show up, then stepping in to introduce himself and his company. To prepare, he put together packages telling about him, his copywriting business and The Writing Workshop. This presentation led to a number of good leads for future business.

Among the unscheduled visits was a meeting with a major national construction company whose government operations representative was so impressed with Sturtevant's work that he hired him to conduct his writing workshop at an upcoming professional development workshop. Originally scheduled for just two days after the Business Matchmaking event, Sturtevant was prepared to go to Washington, D.C. on short notice, but the meeting was re-scheduled for about three months into the New Year.

Even though he participated in only one day of the two-day event, Sturtevant's success in making contacts and gaining potential new business so impressed organizers of the Business Matchmaking event that they asked him to appear on the Small Business Advocate radio program, which he did the day after his event participation.

Business Matchmaking "A Fantastic Experience"

Sturtevant's advice to a small business considering participation in an upcoming Business Matchmaking event is simple:

"Don't hesitate. Just do it. It's a fantastic experience."

He cited the efficiency and smoothness of the event as

"impressive, wonderfully organized and very well run. The types of buyers there were the kind it's hard for a small business to get exposure to. It was wonderful to meet these people and have their individual attention."

With a project gained on the spot and additional potential business to result from follow-up contacts, Sturtevant is definitely glad he persisted in learning more about Business Matchmaking.

"It seemed like a great idea when I first heard of it. I just didn't know how great it was until I participated and experienced it first hand," he said.

Note to Media: Below is contact information to learn more about Sturtevant Partners and its experience with Business Matchmaking.

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