

# Mission Agencies:

## Infrastructure, Passion, Business as Mission?

by Justin Forman

Some experts estimate there to be anywhere from 40,000 to 60,000 people from North America living around the world that would identify themselves as being a full time missionary. At last count there were hundreds of mission sending organizations.

The business as mission (BAM) movement wouldn't hold as much potential as it does today had it not been for the missionaries and the hundreds of sending organizations that have laid the foundation over the past half century. Their sweat, blood and tears are a big part of the shoulders upon which we stand today.

Outreach and cross cultural evangelism has had many new faces that have adapted and changed over the years. The freedom of modern day transportation and globalization has made it possible for us to reach the far corners of the earth in hours, if not days. For better or for worse, this has led to the short term missions explosion. Today, the cry of impoverished countries for basic needs and economic development has led to an accelerated attention on the business as mission movement.

Business as mission has a unique ability to have an influence in areas where traditional methods cannot go. It has also attracted businessmen and women with unique skill sets that have not previously been interested in cross-cultural ministry.

For those reasons, along with many others mission agencies are investigating what their role should be and how they can use their infrastructure and resources to make a difference. I welcome those conversations and I'm greatly encouraged by their work. It has been refreshing to see traditional mission agencies like Pioneers, SIM, and United



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World Mission evaluate what their role should be for people on their team who want to get involved. It is refreshing to see groups like YWAM embrace business as mission by creating resource centres and be a part of launching entrepreneurial efforts like Cards from Africa.

One recognized ministry leader in the United States recently said "Believe it or not, some of the best and most sustainable BAM is happening through traditional mission agencies. It's helping them to be financially sustainable and a more

compelling witness to the local people. At the same time, we need honest dialogue about what works and what doesn't and learn from both our successes and failures. We need to learn from each other between mission agencies and straight for-profit BAM businesses. Churches can help by supporting their business professionals to think missionally about their own workplace and to remind them of God's heart for the world. Missions is more complex than ever—we need to address the hunger and disease a person faces in addition to sharing with them the story of Jesus Christ."

Yes, we all can agree that the non-profit culture of a mission agency is vastly different than a for-profit business. The definitions and roles that both traditional agencies and for-profit businesses play in the movement will be different. Although different there is a dire need for both. It is disappointing to watch

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some conversations between agencies and business become somewhat adversarial. There are far too few resources and people living it for us to be divided.

The infrastructure, people, and lessons that have been learned in the past 50 years by traditional mission groups can be an incredible catalyst to the business as mission movement if channeled correctly. This can only be done if we are patient and willing to work towards the common goal.

Recently I witnessed a thread of emails develop on the topic of defining "real business as mission." I thought one individual who has experience as both a businessman and working for a traditional mission organization said it well:

In general, I fear much energy is being expended on the potentially divisive and distracting debate as to what is "Real Business as Mission." Globally, we operate in a diverse, complex and confusing world with a lot of "grey zone" reality (referring to economies and business). It seems to me that part of the essential spirit of business and the entrepreneur is that they will not and cannot be herded into one pen, and that they are essentially opportunistic and pragmatic. What dignifies and crystallises our practice of BAM, whatever the exact model may look like, is our pursuit of the calling of Christ and our practice of business with integrity, integration and intentionality. The business and charity playing fields are clearly two different things, and I think we would all affirm this. Somewhere in between is the complicated world of development which itself is in a process of change. Regardless, let's make sure that we do our part so that walls between the various communities stay down, and we remain in a learning and communicating posture, that bridges might allow for free passage in both directions.

Mission agencies will be a tremendous catalyst to watch in the business as mission movement in 2007. I look forward to the free exchange of ideas and hope that the conversation will help maximize all of our efforts for the years to come. 🌐



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