

BUSINESS AS MISSION

Engaging Marketplace Potential for Global Impact

An Interview with Doug Hunter
Director of Business Partners International, Perimeter Church

Interchange Postings: Everyone is suddenly talking about “business as mission.” How do you define what BAM is all about?

Doug Hunter: There are a lot of different approaches, but Mats Tunehag, Lausanne Senior Associate for BAM, has developed a helpful definition: “Business as mission is about real, viable, sustainable and profitable businesses with a kingdom of God purpose, perspective and impact leading to transformation of people and societies spiritually, economically and socially to the greater glory of God.”

BAM is not just the creation of businesses but embracing a biblical perspective on business and on work in general. Evangelism in the marketplace, discipleship of people who work, and starting new businesses and building existing ones with intentional kingdom impact are all included in the concept.

IP: So it is “business as mission” not “business as missions”?

Hunter: “Business as mission” goes far beyond “business as missions” with an “s.” Every Christian in the marketplace should be doing business as mission. Every professional, every person who is employed needs to recognize that God has kingdom purposes for the work He gives us and the opportunities that result. Yet BAM does provide a tremendous platform in the cross-cultural context because it offers credibility, access, economic benefits, and relational opportunities, especially where ministry is restricted or where upper levels of society have been difficult to penetrate.

IP: Can you illustrate for us how BAM serves missions?

Hunter: Let me share four situations to introduce some of the varied components in the global context.

First, **BAM emphasizes a biblical perspective of business.** In most of the world, the prevailing view of business is skewed—often totally focused on making money at the expense of other values, or so riddled with corruption that businesspeople are not welcome in churches, or viewed through a compartmentalized lens so that business is dismissed as without value for the kingdom.

But God can use BAM to transform a city. Leaders in a key church in the Arab world began to realize that BAM could be an effective outreach tool, so they challenged their businesspeople to become intentional about using their companies to impact their city. As a result, a number of entrepreneurs developed and implemented kingdom impact plans and their credibility grew.

For example, one company determined to change their perspective from seeing their employees as just commodities to appreciating them as people. They developed programs such as family support groups, English classes, etc. Suddenly their employee turnover rate dropped to almost zero and job applications skyrocketed.

Leaders of another business admitted they were caught up in the culturally acceptable habit of dodging tax payments. They met with the tax department and arranged for appropriate assessment. You can imagine what an impact that made on those running the government tax office! In this case, God honored their obedience and their income level increased to cover the additional taxes.

Second, **BAM is an exciting evangelistic tool.** Perimeter’s partner church in Guatemala wanted to reach the influencers of their society where there had been little Christian impact. We helped one of their pastors develop an understanding of the issues faced by those in the business and government arenas. As he overcame his initial intimidation, God used him

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to launch a new church attractive to non-believing businesspeople. Perimeter annually sent four teams to offer a business training program called High Mark. Now four years later, that church has 1,400 people, including some key leaders.

Third is **marketplace discipleship**. Perimeter Church has come alongside a large partner church in Mumbai, India, to help them add a component to their cell-group training materials emphasizing that work matters to God. The resources give these Christians the tools to be intentional in using opportunities He provides them in the marketplace. I find this to be the toughest aspect of BAM because the concepts must be translated into the local business and cultural setting. It has to be a joint effort—we Americans bring a toolbox of aids, but the national church has to figure out how to help people live their lives holistically within their own culture.

The last aspect I'll touch on is **business building and start up**. If you can help those with established business platforms to be more intentional and excellent in doing business, you increase their credibility and their resources to accomplish kingdom goals.

We do a lot of mentoring. For instance, in Poland we came alongside the managers of a pharmaceutical company and helped them with sales approaches, distribution processes, and efficiency. As business practices improved, the owner also became more intentional about using his relationship to suppliers, customers, and employees and their families for ministry purposes.

In India, we helped launch about 30 micro-businesses—and stayed beside them through the process of training, developing a plan, finding funding, etc. Integrated throughout was the concept that God calls companies into existence for the purpose of making a difference for the kingdom of God.

IP: How does BAM integrate with other types of missions efforts?

Hunter: A significant number of missionaries have come out of a business background. BAM is a way to take advantage of that expertise. Business is a great tool to provide people with credibility and practical connections into the culture. Businesspeople are welcome in many countries where someone with the moniker of missionary is forbidden. We have found that American business expertise is a valuable commodity anywhere in the world, and we can draw a crowd wherever we go. The key is to know what to do with that crowd once they've gathered!

IP: Does a tentmaker fit under the BAM umbrella?

Hunter: It depends. We discourage using business as just a means of getting a visa. If you enter a country pretending to be something you aren't, people quickly become suspicious and you can do more damage than good. But missionaries who pursue two vocations—say church planting and engineering—can demonstrate that both can have great impact for the kingdom if approached with a missional mindset.

IP: How do mission agencies decide if BAM is for them?

Hunter: Give yourself a "BAM Exam" before launching into business-focused ministry. How does ministry in the marketplace fit into your calling? Are your leaders entrepreneurial? There may be certain fields where BAM fits and other places it doesn't. Don't push it if it isn't in your DNA. On the other hand, don't overlook BAM just because it is new or untried. Yes, BAM is messy, but it has tremendous potential!

One of the interesting aspects of BAM is that it can benefit every level of society. For instance, conferences on best business practices can build bridges to CEOs in the often insulated upper class, while micro-business development can help the poorest of the poor. And it

contributes to every aspect of church planting—contact development, evangelism, discipleship, leadership training and financing, and societal transformation from the highest boardrooms to the most poverty stricken ghettos.

IP: If an agency discovers it has "BAM genes," how should it go about involving churches?

Hunter: Challenge potential partners—and that includes churches in the sending country but also potential partners in countries where you are working—to give themselves a "BAM Exam" and assess their business strength. Help them identify types of business acumen and passion. Many times God calls people into missions from other life situations, and often these are corporate.

Businesspeople/Professionals enjoy the marketplace or their practice and are good at what they do. Yet God may be tugging at their heart to make a difference in the world. We have the privilege of showing Christians how to blend these passions. There is amazing response from businesspeople when you tell them that business and business tools can have a role in missions.

IP: Can short-termers use BAM as an effective platform?

Hunter: Absolutely. Perimeter Church has sent businesspeople on many different types of BAM ministry trips.

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Sometimes they do church leader training—helping pastors and other leaders to understand the impact their congregations can have in the marketplace and how to go about it. In some situations we have helped them develop discipleship tools for applying biblical principles to their workplace.

We have also held BAM conferences for lay Christians in various parts of the world. In other locations, we have helped to develop indigenous teams of businesspeople who want to initiate city-wide or regional marketplace efforts.

Using tools such as High Mark www.highmarkinc.org—and there are scores of others—our professionals and businesspeople offer seminars in best practices. In most cases, these benefit both believers and non-believers and often serve as an outreach event. Not only are principles shared, but relationships are developed and our businesspeople share their faith. After they return home, many of our short-termers continue to mentor and encourage their peers overseas via email and phone calls.

Other trips are geared to provide micro-finance training. Or we help sponsor a CEO conference or initiate affinity groups build around a particular profession. The options are almost endless once the church and/or agency have caught the vision. And you will find that businesspeople are creative in unpacking opportunities.

IP: Are there dangers?

Hunter: Of course. You can assume that some people will want to partner simply to get money or opportunities. We have to be as careful as possible but then realize that there will be those who say and do the right things to get the loan, and then disappear. As long as we have done our best to steward the process well, we just move on.

We also have to let God define BAM success. Even if the business is not ultimately successful, the higher goals may have been reached.

IP: There is a flood of books about BAM. Where is a good place to begin?

Hunter: I recommend reading *God Is at Work* by Eldred, *Great Commission Companies* by Rundle and Steffen, or *On Kingdom Business: Transforming Missions through Entrepreneurial Strategies* by Yamamori and Eldred. The website of the International Coalition of Workplace Ministries, www.icwm.net, lists BAM activities around the globe and organizations in the BAM ministry arena.



As the CEO of a successful elevator company, Doug Hunter endured lots of “ups and downs” jokes before joining the staff of Perimeter Church in suburban Atlanta, GA. He directs their BAM ministry, Business Partners International.

What are your thoughts about business as mission, particularly in the global context? Do you have first-hand experience you would like to share with others? Would you like to pose some questions for Doug? The Catalyst website includes an **Interchange Postings Forum** for your reactions at www.catalystservices.org/forum/. We look forward to a stimulating **interchange** of ideas there!

BAM will be featured in another upcoming issue of *Postings*. If you have a case study or experience to share, please notify Ellen Livingood at ellen@catalystservices.org.

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