

Business MATCHMAKING



A Cooperative Agreement between SBA and HP Small Business Foundation

Covers Manufacturing, Inc.

Mansfield, OH

When Daniel Ferguson, president of Covers Manufacturing Inc., first received a flier in the mail regarding a Business Matchmaking event, he was skeptical. So many times in the past he had invested valuable time and money pursuing leads and going to events that did not fulfill his expectations. However, he decided to look into the program further and was hopeful this would be one event that would produce the returns he desired. He was not disappointed.

Covers Manufacturing Inc. (CMI)

Covers Manufacturing specializes in providing new and re-manufactured seating, components and parts for commercial trucks, forklifts, towmotors and other heavy equipment. Additionally, CMI offers top-of-the-line air conditioner, athletic, boat, car, salvage and truck covers; welding curtains; and a wide variety of ready- or custom-made tarps. Customers who have relied on Covers Manufacturing for the past 15 years to provide quality seat coverings at competitive prices include Federal Express, R&L Transfer and Conways.

Because Covers Manufacturing caters in large part to the commercial trucking and boating industries, its business was deeply affected by the slow-down in the U.S. economy. Seeking new ways to generate revenues and leads, Ferguson decided to attend the Business Matchmaking pilot event in Cleveland in October. After filling out a quick-and-easy form on the Business Matchmaking portal web site, Ferguson was “matched” with and scheduled for eight one-on-one meetings with a number of agencies, ranging from the City of Cleveland to the Regional Transit Authority to the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Covers Manufacturing Meets its Match

Ferguson was pleasantly surprised by the professionalism and quality of the event, his pre-scheduled meetings, and the additional services and information provided during the forum. In between his scheduled meetings, Ferguson was able to participate in special seminars, talk to other small business owners to share ideas and concerns, and received valuable information from participating companies, including investment and banking firms.

Through a promotion at one of these booths, Ferguson was able to “guess the correct number of marbles in a jar” to win a free handheld personal organizer. That prize alone, valued at over \$200, would have more than paid for his trip and expenses and made him glad he attended. But the real pay-off came later in the day.

During his meeting with a representative from the City of Cleveland, Ferguson was offered the opportunity to bid for a project that entailed re-upholstering waiting room seating at the Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. Although outside his company’s normal vertical segments (such as trucking and boating), Ferguson bid on the project and was awarded a \$10,000 contract -- a lucrative contract for Covers Manufacturing’s line of business.

“This event opened so many doors for Covers Manufacturing,” said Ferguson. “First, it opened our doors of thinking to doing seating-related work outside our normal client segments. If you would have asked me a year ago if we would be doing work on seating in an airport, I would have said no way! Secondly, this event allowed us to engage with valuable government agencies and contacts that we absolutely could not have made contact with on our own. This event has literally changed the way we will think about and do business in the future.”

Aside from the contract with the City of Cleveland, a number of other strong leads came out of the event for Covers Manufacturing. Ferguson is hopeful several of those leads will turn into full-fledge contracts and long-term relationships.

“This program is phenomenal and really enables small businesses to think and act outside the box,” added Ferguson. “I am definitely going to take advantage of these events in the future, and make them an ongoing part of my lead-generation strategy.”

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

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