

# Business MATCHMAKING



A Cooperative Agreement between SBA and HP Small Business Foundation

## **REK Products, Inc.**

### **Pearland, TX**

For years, George Killingsworth was a successful sign painter by trade. He stayed busy in a booming Houston economy with developers as his main customer base. Then, in the mid-1980s, all signs started pointing downward as the Texas economy crashed, and his business came to a halt.

With time on his hands, Killingsworth decided to paint a new business picture, and in time came up with a new process for manufacturing and mass-producing awards plaques and outdoor signage using a unique sandblasting process. With just four people, including Killingsworth and his wife, the company once again became a success by marketing to the U.S. military and to the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) and numerous golf courses.

### **Scholarship Leads to Relationship with Technology Leader**

When a friend at San Jacinto Junior College called to say a scholarship spot was available at an upcoming Houston Business Matchmaking event, Killingsworth recognized the opportunity to expand his customer base. He had no idea he'd make more than contacts at the two-day event, but also come away with a job and a new business relationship with a world leader in the technology industry.

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.

### **Reality Surpasses Expectations**

**"They told us in the opening session not to expect to write orders on the spot, but to use our 15 minutes in each meeting to get a foot in the door and begin building the relationship," Killingsworth said. "And that's what I set out to do."**

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Killingsworth had five appointments during the Business Matchmaking event, and feels good about all of them at this point.

**"I met with the Department of Agriculture, and it went very well," he said. "Working with the military over the years, I understand there's quite a process in doing business with the government, and I'm prepared to do that."**

Another meeting with a major home improvement chain also resulted in "good contacts" that Killingsworth plans to nurture in hopes of gaining future business.

The surprise came during a break between appointments, when Killingsworth chanced to visit with one of the event managers. He was showing off some products he'd brought along when a senior level executive of the Personal Systems Group (PSG) for HP, one of the event sponsors, stopped by, was taken with the quality of the unique plaques, and immediately helped schedule a formal appointment with other HP representatives there to do business.

**"That day, I met with a buyer for HP in Houston, and with several other folks from HP. They were all professional and courteous, and I left those meetings really feeling good; feeling positive," Killingsworth said.**

After a follow-up meeting with an HP procurement manager the next day where he was asked to bring price quotes and other specifics, Killingsworth was surprised and delighted to learn he'd been awarded a job to produce 100 awards plaques for HP.

Not only a sponsor, HP has supported the Business Matchmaking initiative by ensuring procurement officials are on hand at each matchmaking event. Demonstrating its commitment to small businesses, HP sent 16 buyers to Houston and conducted approximately 250 interviews during the two-day event, including an unplanned meeting with Killingsworth.

For his part, Killingsworth is equally happy to have established a new business relationship. "That's a good order for a small business like ours," Killingsworth said.

**"I'm glad we were invited to participate. Overall, the whole program is excellent and I'd recommend it to any small business looking to grow and be successful. For us, you couldn't have written a better script. It was great."**

Though he's no longer in the sign painting business, George Killingsworth sees all signs pointing in the right direction these days, thanks to some time on his hands and the ability to create a new manufacturing process and a new business in the process, as well.

**Note to Media:** Below is contact information to learn more about REK Products, Inc. and its experience with Business Matchmaking.

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