

BUSINESS

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IBF celebrates its first birthday

BY CLAIRE COMPTON

STAFF WRITER

The British Business Forum (BBF) was conceptualized just over a year ago in December 2007 by members of the Prague business community. Within less than a month, the company was registered and had more than 40 members. Last August, the BBF merged with the Expat Business Association to form the International Business Forum (IBF), an organization for top-level management. Co-founder and Managing Director Jo Weaver spoke to *The Prague Post* about the group's successful first year.

The Prague Post: It's been just over a year since you started BBF, which in August became the IBF via the merger. What sort of goals had you given yourself at the outset, and were they met?

Jo Weaver: We only had a few goals to start off with: The first was to sign up more than 100 members. Second was to break even at the end of the year, without any financial support other than membership fees. Third was to put every crown of income straight back into the association to make it as good as it possibly could be — the IBF is a nonprofit organization. Fourth, and most important, was to ensure that everything we did attracted the senior managers of our member companies. I think we achieved all of these goals and more.

TPP: What has the merger done for both organizations? Was that an unexpected turn of events?

JW: The merger was totally unexpected, but, on reflection, made obvious sense. The EBA had built a reputation for holding excellent events that were attended by exactly the sort of people and companies that we wanted for the IBF, while the BBF was new and keen to do some different things. The merger gave the BBF (or IBF, as it is now) some great new members and ideas, while the EBA members were able to get involved in some new incentives that were interesting to many of them.

TPP: Your mentoring program is unique. How has that taken off, and what have been the results of that program?

JW: The mentoring program, by its very nature, is fairly low profile; i.e., we don't publicize who is mentoring whom. Of the 120 members that we have now, though, many are either acting as mentors or have people in their companies being mentored. Proof that there is a need for something like this is the fact that many of our more recent members have joined primarily to get involved in the mentoring program.

TPP: Membership is limited to 150. Have you hit the "cap" for members? How will you expand in other ways?



COURTESY PHOTO

Weaver says the newly created IBF will keep its main goal of promoting business among its members.

JW: We had 120 members at the end of 2008, and most have already renewed for 2009, plus we continue to receive applications from new companies on a regular basis. Therefore, we are likely to reach our "cap" pretty soon. We also have quite a few members who are keen to sponsor events and seminars, so, as things stand, we are fairly comfortable financially, with no real need to expand. More important is to keep on improving the quality of what we offer to the members, rather than trying to expand the IBF's membership list.

TPP: How and when was the Women in Business program launched? What was the goal for that, and do you believe such a program was "missing" in the Prague business community?

JW: Having been a "woman in business" in the Czech Republic myself for nearly 20 years, I have plenty of firsthand experience of many of the issues. The IBF group focuses purely on business, and welcomes, and expects, men to attend our seminars too. Let's face it, most of us employ a number of

women and issues such as equal pay and equal opportunities and maternity leave, and how the media and senior Czech businessmen treat women in business should be important to everyone who wants to get the best out of their staff, if nothing else.

TPP: How do you ensure members follow due legal processes, and why are ethical business practices such an important part of the IBF?

JW: I think that everyone involved in the IBF to date believes

THE WEAVER FILE

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that for a company to be successful in the long term, it needs to behave correctly. Obviously, we cannot police what our members do on a day-to-day basis; all we can do is to check them out before they are accepted for membership. If we have reasons to believe they are not following due legal processes, we simply terminate their membership.

TPP: What do you consider the biggest success of 2008?

JW: A group of us met Dec. 10, 2007, and discussed the idea of the BBF. On the 17th, we agreed to go ahead. By Jan. 7, we had registered the company, organized the first quarter's events, signed up nearly 40 members, designed the company's corporate image, gone live with the Web site, sent out a press release and a lot more. I think that is quite an achievement!

TPP: What are the IBF's New Year's resolutions?

JW: To continue in the same vein as last year, learn from the mistakes that we made to improve the offer this year, support our members as much as possible, and build on our already significant reputation as an association that brings something new and exciting to the international business community.

TPP: How has last year's financial crisis changed the IBF in terms of goals, what you offer to members and what your priorities have become?

JW: Most of the seminars that we held in the last quarter of 2008 were focused heavily on topics relevant to the crisis, as were our dinners and guest speakers. We will definitely continue that in 2009. We will not change our main goal, though, which is and always has been to promote business between our members, and to try to help in cases of need — something that we have already done for one or two members, and that is likely to become even more important as we go through the year.