

Letting your business open the Doors

Business - making money by providing a service or product that people need or want - is an age-old practice but one that seems to have fallen mostly outside the parameters of modern mission.

But it wasn't always like that. Paul, as the founder of New Testament mission, established a very good pattern as a maker of tents. William Carey, the father of modern mission, lived out this pattern in his business too - first in the cobbler's shop, then a printing press and other businesses he pioneered in India. And the Moravians of Eastern Germany let their business endeavours create a wide range of mission opportunities.

Business as Mission (BAM) is really not a new paradigm of how to do mission - it has just been re-emerging in recent years. It does, however, require a radical mind-set change from the sending church, the receiving church and the mission community.

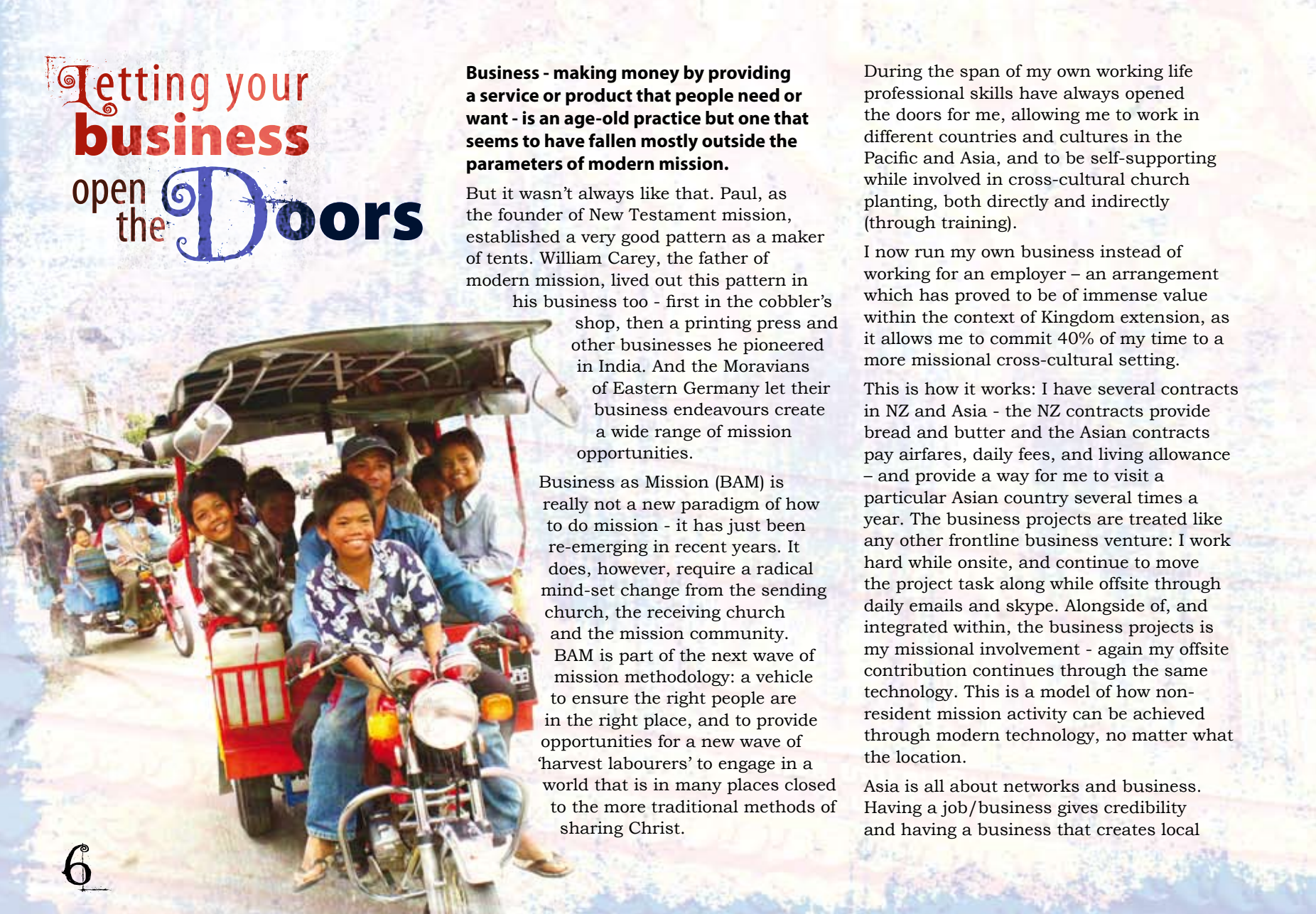
BAM is part of the next wave of mission methodology: a vehicle to ensure the right people are in the right place, and to provide opportunities for a new wave of 'harvest labourers' to engage in a world that is in many places closed to the more traditional methods of sharing Christ.

During the span of my own working life professional skills have always opened the doors for me, allowing me to work in different countries and cultures in the Pacific and Asia, and to be self-supporting while involved in cross-cultural church planting, both directly and indirectly (through training).

I now run my own business instead of working for an employer - an arrangement which has proved to be of immense value within the context of Kingdom extension, as it allows me to commit 40% of my time to a more missional cross-cultural setting.

This is how it works: I have several contracts in NZ and Asia - the NZ contracts provide bread and butter and the Asian contracts pay airfares, daily fees, and living allowance - and provide a way for me to visit a particular Asian country several times a year. The business projects are treated like any other frontline business venture: I work hard while onsite, and continue to move the project task along while offsite through daily emails and skype. Alongside of, and integrated within, the business projects is my missional involvement - again my offsite contribution continues through the same technology. This is a model of how non-resident mission activity can be achieved through modern technology, no matter what the location.

Asia is all about networks and business. Having a job/business gives credibility and having a business that creates local



wealth gives mana. It is in this context that questions are asked and the good news spreads.

My friends, Fred and Mary, went to a city in South East Asia as youth/social workers. After scores of comments from the local community along the lines of “Why have you come to convert us?”, they realised their role and status were not effective. So in their second term they moved to a different city and set up a business using the professional skills from their university training. The city mayor hosted a welcome function for them, and business is good! Not only are they now an accepted part of the community and adding value to it, but they also have more conversations on a daily basis about their faith than they care to count.

I have another expat friend living in the same region who has set up an enterprise that provides essential services. It is organised so that all in the small city share in the benefits. He employs skilled national staff who received their training outside the area, and who also possess UPG (unreached people group) church planting skills. They all live and work in that setting, go about their daily business, and let their work open the doors into people’s lives.

Businesses that operate ethically always stand out, because how you do business is just as important as the business itself. The key to BAM’s success is rooted in the motivation behind it: when you operate a credible business with integrity, adding

value to the local community, the “why” questions will always come up.

A BAMer is not quite the type of person who would have been the ideal candidate to fill a mission vacancy in the 1960s – no, BAMers are indeed a new breed. Most people involved in BAM in the Asia-Pacific region are not headliners – they are heads-down and doing it, with results that are often only noticed by the angels, who rejoice as through a BAMer’s credibility and acceptance, their conversation becomes life to another.

The openings for BAM in Asia are real, and the ways of doing business are wide and varied. On one hand are people like Fred and Mary, who have uprooted and shifted to their chosen country, set up a business, and settled in for the long haul. This is BAM 24/7 Asia style, and suits those who have (even rudimentary) business skills plus the talent to adapt their lifestyle to suit a cross-cultural setting.

On the other hand is the model I have adopted: I have my base outside the country, but my business is structured to enable me to make very regular onsite trips. While there, I deliver the promised product/service, and it is during those interactions in the work context – the conversations, the shared living - that I “gossip the good news”. Critical cross-cultural skills, contextualised conversations, and language adeptness are vital in this scenario. This BAM model suits

someone with a wealth of experience, who would like to use their business skills to help transform lives and communities.

Whatever the mode (resident or non-resident style) the credibility from doing business is paramount, and relationships are the key. In this I have found it immensely satisfying to use the skills God has given me to work in ‘nontraditional’ mission activity. If you feel inspired by the possibilities raised in this article, and would like to learn more about becoming involved, I would love to talk to you - please do get in contact. ☺

The author has a long track record in the educational business sector as well as missions; he can be contacted through the local Interserve office.

