

# Sipco's Hospitality Match Opens the Door to the Middle East for International Suppliers

*Attendees GFI Textiles and Enkeboll Join Forces*

Sipco News Network

**D**UBAI, U.A.E. — “At the event, there were companies that we hadn't seen before in Dubai. To see them all we would have had to have made separate trips and separate appointments. Match certainly saved us money. We already had friends there but we were able to expand those relationships,” said Terry Kucel, president, Townsend Leather and attendee of Hospitality Match Middle East.

Townsend met with over 20 design firms during the event in June, 2007, where 20 hospitality suppliers and some 40 specifiers met at the Park Hyatt in Dubai for Hospitality Match Middle East.

It marked Hospitality Match's first international effort, following two one-to-one meeting events in Las Vegas; one in 2005 and one in 2006. Hospitality Match matches high-end product suppliers with buyers for four-star plus properties.

“It has been successful in the U.S. because it promotes informal networking and expedites the relationship building process—one that could take some a lifetime to achieve,” said Michael Schneider, president, Sipco Events, and the producer of Hospitality Match.

“We took the event abroad this year to give suppliers the opportunity to expand their sales reach in the rapidly developing U.A.E., and give them a singular meeting place where they could meet with the



A shot of the meeting action

major players in that market, in a concise amount of time,” he said.

We followed up with a couple of the suppliers who attended the event to see how they've progressed, six weeks later.

“The people that came to that show came to see people like Townsend. And they come to talk to you specifically about using your product,” said Kucel.

Townsend Leather, as well as Trevira CS, sponsored the event.

Kucel first led Townsend into Dubai five years ago. He works with an agent who lives in Dubai, Venkaraman Kumar, and often travels with him on appointments several times a year.

“Longer term, if you want to be a legitimate supplier in that region of the world, you need to have a local rep, in the time zone, and who understands the culture,” he said.

John Pujol, CEO, Enkeboll Designs, based in Carson, California forged a more unconventional relationship during the event.

“We talked with another one of the participants about allying,” he said.

Enkeboll, an architectural woodcarving company, will join GFI, a high-end fabric supplier, led by president, Franklin Badot.

“He happens to be here in

“**E**veryone told us, you need to have a presence. Don't get with an agent; do it yourself. For the next ten years, we believe the gulf region is going to be humming. We also realize that we need to be green. Dubai has decided that it needs to be green as a whole.”

L.A.,” said Pujol. “We like the prospects of the market. But it's obvious it's not a market where you're going to send your catalog. You're going to have to go there, commit resources; that's daunting. If we share the cost of an office, that's attractive.”

“There is a tremendous investment being made in the Middle East. For our products, there's definitely a place there for them though my product, as a category, really hasn't been used there so it's almost forging new ground. Quite a bit of foundation work but I'm convinced it's appropriate. When they see it, they'll love it, appreciate it and want to have it,” said Pujol.

“Our gut is that we will be well-rewarded to go there. You can't go in with fear and trepidation. It's clear that the potential is there. This is not going to be easy; it's going to be a commitment.”

Pujol plans to return to the Middle East after the month-long

Ramadan observance.

“The event was a real eye-opener, and the quality and variety of attendees was good,” said Badot.

“I'm going back in August to make some follow-up sales calls, look at locations and interview a few people. By early next year, we'll be in operation. But in the mean time, we'll be selling,” he said.

With regard to the scope and buying power that Dubai is said to have, Badot commented, “it's really there.”

He too took the advice that one needs to be on the ground to get a piece of the pie, especially now that their competitors, such as Valley Forge, have formally established themselves in Dubai.

“Everyone told us, you need to have a presence. Don't get with an agent; do it yourself. For the next ten years, we believe the gulf region is going to be humming. We also realize that we need to be green. Dubai has decided that it needs to be green as a whole. Even in the U.S. we have more and more requests. I think the word is out.”

In addition to the green factor, the selling point in Dubai is high-end.

“You're not going to succeed with run-of-the-mill product,” said Badot.

Kucel, of Townsend Leather, agreed.

“Our customers like us coming and visiting because they like that we're bringing something new,” he said. “When we show things like our Lisbon decorative, embossed leather tiles with pattern, people get it.”

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Left: John Pujol, CEO, Enkeboll Designs; Bottom: Stanley Paul Benny, Terry Kucel and Venkaraman Kumar, Townsend Leather

