

# Building bridges between businesses

## INTERVIEW WITH DAVID WEI

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALIBABA.COM



**DAVID WEI** holds a bachelor's degree in international business management from Shanghai International Studies University and is a graduate of the corporate finance programme at the London Business School. He began his career with Coopers & Lybrand, now part of PricewaterhouseCoopers, in 1995 before joining Orient Securities Co as managing director and head of investment banking. In 2000 he was appointed CFO of B&Q China and in 2002 became the company's President. He joined the Alibaba Group in November 2006 and assumed his current position in October 2007.

### How would you describe Alibaba.com to someone unfamiliar with the company?

The company was founded in China in 1999 and has always had a very clear mission: to make it easy to do business anywhere. We've since grown to become a truly global business with more than 19,000 employees across the Alibaba Group and more than 53 million registered members. It's our mission to make it easier for companies to do business anywhere.

We offer a global online community of business-to-business (B2B) professionals where businesses can meet, interact and learn about new trade opportunities and product trends. We also provide information on the latest techniques to help businesses grow and succeed.

### How satisfied are you with the company's experience of investing in the UK and what are your aspirations for the UK market?

Alibaba.com Europe opened its London office in spring 2009. We are dedicated to opening a world of new markets for UK buyers and suppliers. In our first year we invested over one million pounds in our UK marketing and advertising campaign. This year, we will continue to invest in developing the UK market with localised advertising and marketing activity. Additionally, we are committed to hiring local talent to grow our UK business. As a graduate of the corporate finance programme at the London Business School, and having worked for a number of international companies prior to joining Alibaba.com, I bring a distinct viewpoint to our management that bridges China and the UK.

We have seen a large and growing number of UK firms wanting to sell to China as much as they want to buy. Businesses want to cut costs and find new customers, so they use an online platform such as ours to get them through economic downturns and build new relationships. We believe it is the small-business sector that has helped China to become the number one exporter in the world. While large Chinese companies cannot yet compete with the likes of BMW or Siemens, its smaller businesses are robust, entrepreneurial and hungry. We see this reflected in the UK and wider European market as well. The smaller, more nimble organisations are going to be able to take advantage of the shifting trade winds to their best advantage and we aim to be there to help them.

We approach our business with a 102-year (long-term) vision, not just 12 months or 5 years. Our mission is about making it easy to do business for small businesses, and we are constantly guided by our values and top of the list is putting our customers first. We will continue to listen to our customers' needs, improve our platform through introducing new features and enhance the trust and safety features to give our customers peace of mind.

Our primary goal in the UK is get our brand out in the marketplace, so that more small business know that Alibaba.com is here and can help them improve their business. As of 30th June 2010 we had more than 757,000 registered users in the UK, up 67 percent year-on-year.

We want to acquire as many users as possible to build our overall user base and grow market leadership. At this point, we are not focused on monetisation, simply gaining and retaining as many happy users as possible to build a strong foundation for our company in Europe.

### How can Alibaba help build business links between China, the UK and the rest of the world?

In the early years of our company, our website formed a bridge between China's multitude of factories and their customers in the United States and Europe. Now, we are seeing the traffic on that bridge go in both directions and to many other regions in the world. We couldn't have done this without a true respect for the way that business is run in the UK and the rest of the world. We take customer service very seriously and the most important part of customer service is listening. Different cultures communicate in different ways and if we don't truly understand and work with those differences, then we have failed.

### What R&D activities you are undertaking in the UK?

Each quarter, our UK team conducts extensive focus groups and 1:1 research with our UK customer base. We do so to better understand the pain points that each of our customers feel in running their business. We also undertake this activity to get direct feedback on the usability of our e-commerce platform. This research is compiled into a detailed report and shared with our UK team and the web development, management and customer service teams globally. We feel that lessons learned in the UK can help improve our service and offerings, which ultimately benefit the customer in growing their business. **F**