

PART I

Alibaba.com: The Opportunity

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Alibaba.com Opens the Door to Global Trade

When you first arrive at Alibaba.com's home page you may feel exactly like the original Ali Baba felt upon opening the door to his room of secret treasure. Nearly anything you can think to buy or sell is waiting for you on the site. You can explore more than 5.5 million storefronts offering manufactured products in 40 different categories from more than 240 countries and territories spanning the globe. As you explore Alibaba.com you will be joined by more than 42 million registered users. If you operate a small to medium-size enterprise (SME), you may find that Alibaba.com's home page offers you treasure every bit as precious as the one our humble hero Ali Baba enjoyed.

Anyone who operates a SME will tell you that having a constant and reliable source of quality products is essential to building and sustaining a successful business. With the advent of the Internet, not only did an entirely new world of e-commerce open up to those who were eager to explore it, but now there are simply no boundaries tying any of us to one particular part of the globe. The Internet in general and e-commerce specifically have made the whole world our neighborhood and nearly every global citizen our prospective customer. Never before in history has such a wealth of opportunity been available, brought together in one single place on the Web.

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Ali Baba may well have first found himself overwhelmed by his bounty. You may also look at the Alibaba.com home page, shown in Figure 1.1, and feel just a little dizzy over the possibilities. With so many choices available and so much potential opportunity, you will need some guidance as you learn your way around this vibrant and exciting new world. That's where this book will help. Throughout the coming chapters you will find a wealth of information and advice to get you up to speed on everything you will need to know to use the Alibaba.com web site effectively, safely, and successfully. Dozens of experienced users have been overwhelmingly generous in sharing their experience, wisdom, and knowledge to help you follow in the steps they have taken to the successful lives they once only dreamed about. Dreaming is a very good place to start your journey.



Figure 1.1 Alibaba.com's home page promises a wealth of trading opportunities.

First a Little History

When Ali Baba spoke his magic words, a door to a world of riches opened to reveal the treasure that was just waiting for a bright and ambitious young man to explore. When Jack Ma, a self-proclaimed dreamer and Alibaba.com's founder, was planning and dreaming of his e-commerce business, this favorite childhood story came to his mind. As it happens, the tale of Ali Baba is quite popular among children in China. The story's global appeal is clear to any youngster dreaming of standing in Ali Baba's curly shoes. Jack Ma, however, is more than just a dreamer. He is also a man of action.

As a young man growing up in Hangzhou, China, Jack discovered he had an aptitude for learning the English language. At the age of 12, he was eager to build his English language skills and offered his services as a tour guide to foreign visitors. All throughout his teen years, he continued to build his English language skills, and after graduating from college, he became an English teacher. He also worked as a translator, and through this experience he made his first visit to the United States, during the mid-1990s. That's when he saw the Internet for the first time, and suddenly a whole new world of potential opportunity opened up within his mind.

Jack quickly recognized the potential the Internet would have for helping people all over the world build rewarding lives by sharing information and trading goods. He went home determined to help bring the Internet to the people of China. Jack's first e-commerce business was a sort of Yellow Pages directory called China Pages, believed to be China's first commercial Internet site. Having had this experience, many people would have begun dreaming of riches, but that was not Jack Ma's initial intention. "Being successful isn't just about making money," Jack said. "You have to create something. You create value for people. You help people, and then people help you. As a business, helping others is the result, not the process. Life is more fun than that."

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Instead, Jack took the American dream of successful business ownership back home and set about helping small to medium-size business owners make that dream come true in China. Jack saw the Internet and e-commerce as the perfect tools to help small and struggling manufacturers in his part of the world reach global customers. By doing that, they could prosper while creating jobs and lifting even more people out of poverty.

Today, of course, Alibaba.com is the most successful Internet company in China, and Jack is a very successful man by any measure. More than that, his dream of helping the struggling manufacturers he knew locally has spread across the globe. Now millions of Alibaba.com members are operating and expanding successful businesses, both manufacturing and sourcing products for sale in a global marketplace. You stand ready to become the newest dreamer to step onto the site and make your own dreams come true.

Some Alibaba.com Myths Debunked

Perhaps every company achieving near-meteoric success carries with it some myths that ultimately become more recognizable than the facts. Before going too much further, here is your opportunity to join the ranks of those who know both the myths and the facts that will lay those myths to rest.

- ♦ *Alibaba.com is the Chinese eBay.* Here is a misunderstanding that almost refuses to die. The only similarity between the U.S.-based online auction site eBay and Alibaba.com is that both companies operate on the Internet. eBay provides its members a way to buy and sell on the site. Alibaba.com, however, offers users a platform that gives them the opportunity to identify trading partners and create partnerships between manufacturers who need to sell their goods, and entrepreneurs who need to purchase goods for resale.

- ♦ *Alibaba.com is only useful for finding manufacturers in China.* Certainly you will find many Chinese manufacturers on the Alibaba.com platform. However, you are just as likely to find a reliable trading partner in Birmingham, Alabama, as you are to find one near Beijing. Remember that manufacturers from more than 240 countries and territories gather together on the site.
- ♦ *Only large and experienced companies have the resources and knowledge necessary for sourcing internationally through Alibaba.com.* There was certainly a time when the import/export business required expertise and experience most people simply did not possess. Today businesses of every size can easily find products to buy and customers to serve through Alibaba.com's easy-to-use site. Most of the people interviewed for this book had never sourced (or even sold) products internationally before working with the trading partners they found through Alibaba.com. As a matter of fact, many of them had never even operated their own businesses before they brought their ideas to the site and set about fulfilling their dreams of developing their own businesses.
- ♦ *You will need some knowledge of the Chinese language to effectively use Alibaba.com.* Nothing could be further from the truth. Many manufacturers, no matter where they reside, have someone on staff who speaks English. Without English language skills, manufacturers limit the potential market for their products. Plus, with technological advancements, translation software available both on Alibaba.com and from sources outside the site goes a long way toward completely eliminating language barriers.

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- ♦ *Factories overseas have poor labor and environmental standards.* This myth is a little piece of xenophobia that can be difficult to overcome. Many small business owners with whom we spoke had first tried sourcing their products in the United States. Some of them told us directly that upon visiting the factories here, they decided to look overseas, because they were not happy with the working conditions they found domestically. If you set your principles high for both labor and environmental standards, you will find companies that meet those standards and companies that fail to meet those standards in every corner of the globe.
- ♦ *Alibaba.com is only useful if you want to sell through the Internet.* The products sourced through Alibaba.com can be sold through many different channels. Although some business owners operate largely on the Internet, many others distribute their products through every wholesale and retail outlet you can imagine. It's not unheard of for someone who has started out as an Internet retailer to eventually open a brick-and-mortar outlet, too.

Alibaba.com's Corporate Goals and Values

You may think that it's not very important for people outside a company to know its corporate goals. Yet Alibaba.com's goals permeate every part of its site and are reflected in every business decision it makes. As an Alibaba.com member, in a sense your fortunes are tied to the company's; therefore, understanding its corporate goals can help you achieve your own.

Alibaba.com's history is a short one, because the company has only been operating for a mere 10 years. In 1999, Jack Ma

gathered 17 friends and brought them together in his apartment to fashion and launch a company that is now part of a multibillion-dollar corporation. Over the course of the past decade, not only have all 18 original team members stayed together, but this successful corporation still owns that humble apartment where the story all began. Today the team still uses it for meetings and strategy sessions, returning to their early roots as they set about building the company and achieving the goals they set not so very long ago.

Three main corporate goals have driven Alibaba.com from the very start:

1. To make it easy to do business from any place on earth.
2. To be an essential partner to all businesspeople.
3. To build a company that lasts 102 years.

ALIBABA.COM'S SIX CORE VALUES

Now, we're betting you're especially curious about that last goal, involving lasting 102 years. Later in this chapter, Jack Ma himself explains what's behind that. For now, let's discuss the company's core values.

With the three main corporate goals identified, Jack and his founding team established six core values to help them drive their new company. Some of these values may seem a little surprising to Western businesspeople, but they have served Alibaba.com and its customers well through the years, keeping the company focused on achieving the strategic goals with which the founders began their company. All Alibaba.com employees are coached in these core values when they join the company. In their semiannual performance reviews, how closely employees' work and attitudes adhere to these core values is considered equally as important as the actual business goals set for them. Let's take a look at each of them.

1. *The customer comes first.* Although businesses here in the United States often claim that “the customer is always right,” many of us who serve as the customer know that this is an ideal often not upheld, not even by a long shot. For Alibaba.com, this is the most important of the core values. Never lose sight of the reality that it is your customer who pays you. Therefore, the first order of business is to please the customer so that customer will come back to you again and again.
2. *Teamwork.* Stay loyal to your team members, because with loyalty binding a team together, that team can weather all sorts of challenges. Implicit in this statement is perhaps the most astounding piece of strategy from a Western corporate point of view. If your customer is first, and your team is second, where does that leave your stockholders? After all, Alibaba.com is a public company with millions of stockholders to consider. Alibaba.com’s corporate belief about stockholders is that you don’t pay much attention to them. Succinctly put: Your customers pay you; your team stays with you; your stockholders are gone at the first sign of trouble. As surprising as this may be to American ears, it actually makes a lot of sense! Figure 1.2 shows just how celebratory a successful team can be.
3. *Embrace change.* It is not enough to just passively accept that change will come. Rather, Alibaba.com employees must enthusiastically embrace change.
4. *Passion.* A key ingredient for motivation, passion for your work brings passion to your life and makes every day exciting. An employee infused with passion is destined to find success.
5. *Integrity.* Without this key ingredient, you can’t truly serve customers or build a loyal team.
6. *Commitment.* Alibaba.com employees are expected to show a dedicated focus in satisfying and supporting their



Figure 1.2 Jack Ma and other Alibaba.com team members celebrate the company's success.

customers. During the difficult economic time period of early 2009, when businesses in the United States and China were struggling to get the credit necessary to keep growing, Alibaba.com willingly cosigned loans for loyal customers to help them through any difficulties they were having getting credit. Overall, the company secured more than \$7.9 billion (HK) for suppliers in Guangdong, Jiangsu, and Shandong provinces and in Shanghai.

A Conversation with Jack Ma



Figure 1.3 Jack Ma, Founder of Alibaba.com, is an award-winning businessman.

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Jack Ma, shown in Figure 1.3, may have come from humble roots, but today he has become a global symbol of business success. His awards are abundant. He has been named one of *Time* magazine's TIME 100: The World's Most Influential People. *Barron's* has named him one of the 30 World's Best CEOs. *BusinessWeek* named him one of the 25 Most Influential People on the Web, and these are awards received in just the past two years. In 2007, *BusinessWeek* named him the BusinessPerson of the Year.

Having received so many business awards, today Jack Ma is something akin to a rock star in China, and he's greatly admired all over the world. He was generous with his time in answering our questions, and we are very pleased to be able to share his responses with you.

When you think back over the years, what has surprised you the most about Alibaba's growth and development?

There are days when I am surprised that we survived and have grown into a successful company despite all the mistakes we have made and the challenges we have faced, like the Internet bubble burst in 2000. If I ever write a book about Alibaba, I will call it *1,001 Mistakes*. We are still here today because we learned from our mistakes, we improved each year, and we never gave up our dreams. We survived because at the beginning we had no money, no technology, and no plan. So we used every dollar very carefully. Our first office was opened in my apartment. We only expanded when we raised funding from outside. We didn't go into debt.

What I learned from Alibaba is that you have to have a set of common values for the team, as well as a vision for where you want to go and a sense of mission to get there. You also have to have perseverance. Never give up

your dreams and you always have a chance to succeed. Also, I learned that when you are small, you have to be very focused and rely on your brain, not your strength. As I have said before, my inspiration came from the American movie *Forrest Gump*. Because Forrest Gump said, “shrimp,” we decided to help SMEs. We wanted to catch the shrimps instead of catching the whales. Forrest Gump is not a smart guy, but he is focused. He is not talented, but he is very, very hardworking. And he is very simple and opportunistic. The thing I told my wife, my parents, and my friends, is the sentence Forrest Gump said: “Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get.”

Have your endeavors on the Internet lived up to the expectations you had when you first realized the powerful impact the Internet would have on both China and the world at large?

The Internet has revolutionized the way we do business and is changing people’s lives. When I started one of China’s first web sites in 1995, Internet usage in China was minuscule, and now, 14 years on, China has around 3 million web sites and 300 million Internet users, heading toward half a billion in the next two to three years. I believe that in a few years’ time, the Internet will become inseparable from every facet of our lives and let us live in ways we never imagined. There will be no distinction between online and offline. The Internet will be everywhere, a part of life, just like water is today.

We started Alibaba with a dream to help SMEs make money through the Internet. Today, that dream is being realized as Alibaba.com is providing jobs and opportunities for millions of entrepreneurs and SMEs around the world. People often come up to me at airports and hotels

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to thank me for the new opportunities being created through our web sites. The other day a hotel worker told me that his wife began selling things on TaoBao.com, our consumer e-commerce web site, and now makes more money than he does!

There are also many, many American entrepreneurs who have successfully used our platform to start their own businesses, connecting with buyers and sellers via Alibaba. A small business owner from Florida once praised Alibaba.com because it has leveled the playing field and enables him to compete with big companies around the world, something he never thought possible. But there are still so many entrepreneurs and small business that we need to reach out to. That is what keeps me motivated. What is important in my life is that I can do something that can influence and improve the lives of many people and SMEs.

When you look at the next 30 years of your company, what are you most excited about?

The Internet is changing our lives so quickly that no one knows what the world will look like in 30 years' time. Our vision is to build a company that lasts 102 years (so we span three centuries, because no Chinese company has yet to remain in business that long). Today we have only traveled 10 years. In 30 years we won't even be halfway. We have a very long-term view but our mission will never change: to make doing business easy for SMEs around the world.

As long as we stay focused on this mission and provide a service that adds real value to the lives and businesses of our members, then we will be successful. I am excited that we will create jobs for even more entrepreneurs and SMEs, and that global trade will benefit small companies, not just large corporations.

Do you recognize anything within yourself that would have once allowed you to believe you'd create a company where people could gather to build their own businesses?

I am a dreamer, and I never give up hope. I am also persistent. I didn't get into college on my first try or even my second. But I finally did. I am also loyal to those who are loyal to me. I stayed at my first job for five years because I made the commitment to do so, even though I could have left early and made more money elsewhere. But my word was my word. I now feel like we've given our word to our SME customers and our buyers globally, and we won't back down from making good on our commitments there, either.

Once I realized the Internet might be a powerful tool for SMEs in China and abroad, I wholeheartedly pursued my dream of setting up an e-commerce company. In 1999, I gathered 18 people in my apartment and spoke to them for two hours about my vision. Everyone put their money on the table, and that got us \$60,000 to start Alibaba. I wanted to have a global company, so I chose a global name. Alibaba is easy to spell, and people everywhere associate it with "Open, Sesame," the command that Ali Baba used to open doors to hidden treasures in *One Thousand and One Nights*.

I don't want to be recognized as a successful businessman, because I believe that if *I* can be successful, then 80 percent of young people around the world can be successful also. I am just a normal guy. If you work hard, if you learn quickly, then I think anyone has the chance.

Believe in your dream and believe in yourself. Do it because you want to do it, not because the investor wants you to do it, and not because other people want

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you to do it. Don't give up the dream, and do anything you can to make sure you are getting close to your dream every day. Find good people, get your customers to love you. Learn quickly, and learn from others the tactics and the skills, but don't change your dream.

I remember in 2000, I said if there are nine rabbits on the ground, if you want to catch one, just focus on one. Change your tactics if you need to, but don't change the rabbit—just stick with it. There are so many opportunities out there that you cannot catch them all. Get one first, put it in your pocket, and then catch the others.

What responsibilities do you believe those of us fortunate enough to have access to and an understanding of this technology have toward those who are less fortunate and may not have the means to gain equal access to these tools?

I am not a technology guy. All I can do on the computer is e-mail and browse the Internet. So if Jack Ma can use Alibaba.com then anyone can. Small and medium enterprises want a business tool that is easy to use so it has to be “click and get it.” If I can't get it, then it won't go on our site. The great thing about the Internet is that it's inexpensive and can be accessed by almost anyone, rich or poor. An entrepreneur in Bangalore or Buenos Aires can get the same information and opportunity from Alibaba.com as someone in Los Angeles or London. As long as you can get online then you can benefit from global trade. Our job is to facilitate the spread of the Internet and e-commerce so more entrepreneurs and SMEs can benefit from it.

Alibaba.com Today

Today, Alibaba.com is clearly recognized as the largest and most successful business-to-business (B2B) web site in the world, and

it can also claim its place among the world's most successful Internet companies. On November 6, 2007, Alibaba.com's stock began trading on the Hong Kong exchange. By the end of the day the company had raised \$1.7 billion, resulting in the biggest initial stock offering ever for a Chinese Internet company. Investors sought more than 180 times the number of shares offered!

By January 2009, the company was doing quite well, in spite of the economic downturn that spread around the globe during the fourth quarter of 2008. Alibaba.com announced that total revenue for the company increased 39 percent over 2007, and registered users jumped by 80 percent. More than 1 million new members joined during each of the third and fourth quarters of 2008, representing the biggest quarterly increases since Alibaba.com was founded. "We see the current global economic crisis as a great opportunity to help our SME customers move online," said David Wei, chief executive officer for Alibaba.com.

ALIBABA.COM CORPORATE STRUCTURE

Alibaba.com is part of the Alibaba Group. It is currently the only segment of the corporation that is available to users outside of China. Alibaba.com operates three distinct online marketplaces. In addition to the international marketplace, Alibaba.com, the corporation also operates a Chinese marketplace for domestic trade within China, Alibaba.com.cn; and another marketplace for trade to and from Japan, Alibaba.co.jp. All of the other companies within the Alibaba Group are independent and operate with their own set of financial goals. Here is a quick look at what the other companies in the Alibaba Group do:

- ♦ *TaoBao.com* is the consumer-to-consumer platform that often is mistaken as the Chinese eBay. Currently TaoBao.com, which means "hunting for treasure," enjoys a 70 to 80 percent market share for online shopping in China. Although TaoBao.com soundly beat eBay in the Chinese market, causing the U.S. giant to retreat, it is actually quite different in that only commodity items are sold on the site. People in China tend not to buy secondhand goods.

TaoBao.com also includes the offerings of two formerly separate Alibaba Group companies, Alimama and Koubei.com. Alimama was a marketplace for web publishers, and Koubei.com provided online classified listings.

- ♦ *Alipay* is in China similar to PayPal in the United States. It currently enjoys a 50 percent market share for online payments.
- ♦ *Alisoft* is a platform for Internet and software development. Its products include management software to support SMEs in accounting, finance, and inventory management.

ALIBABA.COM'S PROGRAMS, TOOLS, AND EVENTS

Over the years, Alibaba.com has developed an effective group of programs and tools to make using the site easier, safer, and more rewarding. As you sign on to the site today, you will see that you have quite a good variety of research options and safety programs to help you learn your way around the marketplace and conduct your transactions safely and securely. Chapter 4 will take you on a detailed tour of everything the site has to offer, but even before you get that far, let's explore some of the programs and tools that will help you most effectively use the site, even as you are just beginning to learn your way around.

Alibaba.com's Gold Suppliers

Many users register with Alibaba.com and operate as free members while they search for products to source and markets in which to sell their goods. Free membership is an effective choice for buyers seeking to locate new sources of products, but as you begin to narrow down your search for trading partners on the site, you will soon see that it is wise to gravitate toward the Gold Suppliers, the ones who pay for membership on Alibaba.com. Gold Suppliers have been authenticated and verified by an independent and reputable third-party security service provider. This authentication process includes thorough examinations of a

company's registration documents and business history to ensure that buyers have found a legitimate company and worthy trading partner.

Working with Gold Suppliers adds instant credibility and trust for any prospective buyer, but that is especially true for new buyers. The fact that a company has paid for the privilege of bringing its products to the Alibaba.com marketplace enhances the sense of trust and demonstrates a commitment far beyond just making a fast dollar. Time and again, you will read about SMEs who never consider looking beyond the pool of Gold Suppliers for the products they want to purchase. That doesn't mean that free members on the site are not worthy trading partners, but knowing that your prospective trading partner has made a financial commitment to verify its company as an authentic trading partner boosts confidence among buyers worldwide.

In return for an annual fee, Gold Suppliers receive many benefits in addition to enhanced credibility. Among them are an unlimited number of product listings. Alibaba.com has found that Gold Suppliers generate an average of 22 percent more inquiries than free members do. They also have exclusive access to new buying leads, posted by prospective customers, a full seven days before those leads become visible to free members. Gold Suppliers can use Alibaba.com Web design templates to create professional company web sites, and Alibaba.com will work with Gold Suppliers in China to create brief videos about their businesses and operations that will appear on the site. They gain greater exposure to targeted trade shows within their respective industries, and Gold Suppliers' products appear first in the search results pages any time a prospective buyer searches for a relevant item. Finally, Gold Suppliers can access real-time analyses and compare their performance to industry averages on such analytics as customer clicks, page views, and buyer inquiries.

Until 2009, the Gold Supplier program was available only to members based in China. In the summer of 2009, Alibaba.com expanded the program to include the Gold Supplier international

edition. With the advent of international Gold Supplier status, businesspeople across the globe gained access to the same verification process, promotional opportunities, and tools as Chinese Gold Suppliers. With the initial launch of the international program, Gold Suppliers outside of China have the Gold Supplier logo, the first-level priority listings, and product showcases available to them immediately. Later, additional features such as premium web site design templates and factory videos will be added. The initial cost of the Gold Supplier international edition is \$2,999 (U.S.) per year, which is similar to the entry-level Gold Supplier package available in China.

Gene Rumley: An Alibaba.com Premium Member

Gene Rumley of Lake Mary, Florida, is the director of international marketing for Bell Performance, Inc. The company is more than 100 years old and produces fuel additives for engines of all sorts. Since 2006, Bell Performance, Inc., has been a premium member of Alibaba.com. As you make your way through the chapters of this book, you will learn about many successful businesspeople. Gene has been very generous in sharing his expertise with us, and he added a special perspective as a premium member.

“A paid member has maximum exposure on the Alibaba.com web site,” he explained. “They can list all of their products and information, giving the buyer confidence that this company has had a background check. A member can also receive reports online with the number of leads coming into their e-mail. There is also a system that screens out spam e-mail. Being a paid member gives our company, Bell Performance, more qualified leads and puts us in front of more qualified international companies. Alibaba.com has greatly helped us expand our International business, making it possible to reap the financial rewards. We received over

\$250,000 in additional orders in the past 12 months, and we are working on several international leads with multimillion-dollar possibilities.”

Training Program

In June 2009 Alibaba.com announced a series of training programs geared to entrepreneurs and SMEs in the United States. These take the form of free instructor-led webinars designed to help members source products effectively and also work with suppliers safely and productively. The series is called *Buyers Basics* and comprises two programs:

1. “Sourcing Products” covers the best ways to find and work with suppliers.
2. “Dealing with Suppliers” covers all aspects of the buyer-seller relationship, from vetting to closing the deal.

The webinars are live but are also recorded and remain available on the Alibaba.com site at success.alibaba.com. As we write this, Alibaba.com is planning another series of webinars for suppliers that is expected to launch in 2010.

TradeManager

The Alibaba.com site offers you a great many tools for enhancing your understanding of international trade and gaining expertise as you learn to import your products and trade with the world. Chapter 4 provides a complete introduction to many of the things that will make you an effective Alibaba.com user. Before you leave this chapter, however, a quick look at TradeManager will set you up for instant communication with potential trading partners all over the world.

TradeManager is a live, real-time tool that lets you communicate via instant messaging. Every person who talked with

us about working on the site mentioned what a valuable and effective tool this is. Many told us that they make their very first inquiries with prospective new partners through e-mail and move almost immediately to completing transactions via TradeManager. Best of all, TradeManager is free and downloads simply in just a few moments. You are bound to find it invaluable as you go about building your relationships with trading partners all over the world, or even in the next state.

AliFest

Every year, Alibaba.com hosts a festival-like gathering of international businesspeople at its headquarters in Hangzhou. As many as 10,000 people come from all over the world to share ideas and learn about international trade. As part of the annual meeting Alibaba.com hosts an award ceremony naming the Top 10 Online Businesspeople of the Year. The annual meeting is greatly anticipated and the people we've spoken with who have attended remember their experience with enthusiasm and satisfaction. Perhaps the day will come when you will travel to China as an attendee, but until that day, we are happy to share with you the story of one successful businessman who did.

Alibaba.com's 2008 e-Business Champion of the Year: Gene Rumley

Gene Rumley came to Alibaba.com in 2006 searching for new international markets for his company's products. In 2008, he enjoyed the distinction of attending AliFest and earning the award as the e-Business Champion of the Year. Gene remembers his experience quite fondly. He appeared with other businesspeople on a panel to discuss international trade. He was deeply impressed, not only by AliFest, but also by Alibaba.com's corporate headquarters and its leader, Jack Ma.

Gene's first impression was of the manner in which Alibaba.com is operated. "I've been in business for over 30 years,"

he told us. “Rarely have I seen a U.S. company so well organized and run. The most interesting part of the trip was to see the inner workings of Alibaba.com. The company seems to be very highly organized. Everyone I’ve dealt with has been very professional; so on-time, fulfilling requests and answering e-mails.”

“Right after the panel session I was on, they had Jet Li and Jack Ma appear on a panel,” he remembers. “They opened the floor up and offered anyone who had problems or difficulties to ask questions about how they could improve their businesses.

“There’s a hunger for people to get ahead, and a lot of times people who are very successful don’t make time to help smaller people get ahead,” Gene told us. “They really treat people well.” Gene told us that having the opportunity to hear Jack Ma speak was, in itself, worth the trip to China!

As you get ready to move on to Chapter 2 and learn the basics behind international sourcing, you can take with you the dream of someday following along in Gene’s footsteps.

