

## **Developing Corporate Partnerships** *by Giovanni Crupi*

### **The Museum**

The link between technical museums and industry has always been strong. Museums reveal the historical, technical, aesthetical and social values of the items they display; they tell stories about the people who invented or used the objects and the companies that produced them. The role of a technical museum is to be a reliable center of knowledge for the study, and safeguarding of an industry's heritage—both physical and intangible—and to promote its cultural value to the broader public.

Guido Ucelli, administrator of one of the biggest Italian companies, first had the idea of creating an “Arts and Industry Museum”[in Milan] to exhibit the evolution of production processes and to increase technical and scientific awareness in Italy. In 1958, the founder of the museum, during a speech in the presence of [Alcide di Gasperi] President of the Italian Republic at that time, pointed out that the idea for the first Italian air industry grew out of a visit to the Deutsches Museum. To develop the museum's exhibitions from its first years up to the 1960s, many Italian and foreign companies as well as diverse entrepreneurial families were called upon to donate machines, memorabilia, records and, sometimes, funds. The [Italian] companies included: Fiat, Alfa Romeo, Falck, Dalmine, Olivetti, and Eni.

Since 2001, the dialogue between the museum and the companies has evolved, updating the models of cooperation typical of the first years of the museum's activity. Museums play a key role in contemporary society as places of experience and understanding accessible to everybody. They encourage knowledge for all generations by placing the individual at the center of the educational experience.

Now, the National Museum of Science and Technology “Leonardo da Vinci” is the largest scientific museum in Italy and one of the top five in Europe. Internationally recognized to be a leader for its methods of informal education in science and technology, it is the foremost museum in the world dedicated to Leonardo da Vinci. It stands out in the panorama of scientific museums for its partnerships with companies, based on the sharing of cultural objectives and combined working efforts.

These goals and the high degree of planning skills and innovation comprise the main points of leverage for the museum to accomplish its mission

## **The Reasons for Corporate Partnership**

The renewal and innovation activities of the Science and Technology Museum are divided into projects of varying size and type. Each project has specific objectives and a dedicated budget decided through fundraising activities with public and private partners.

There are several objectives of the museum that make it essential to develop alliances with private corporations:

- Renew exhibition themes and contents so that they are linked with modern times and also look towards the future;
- Raise funds to finance the transformation process of the museum;
- Use the museum as an open democratic context to create and host occasions for dialogue and discussion on contemporary scientific issues, including controversial ones, among scientists, researchers, industrial experts, citizens, media and scholars.

The new aspect of this museum and other similar institutions is to systematically make the *partnership* a way to create relations. Indeed, for the creation of thematic exhibitions, corporate partners are asked, in addition to their financial support, for the active participation of their experts in the various phases of the project: the conceptual phase, the exploration of general themes and crucial aspects of the industrial field; the developmental phase, the in-depth study of the scientific and technological contents, of the research situation and the innovation path, the study of the historical context and of the corporate identity. Scientific discussion is always under the supervision of the curators of the thematic departments of the museum.

Activities consist of :

- Interviews with strategic people, experts of know-how and corporate history, researchers for the description of future scenarios;
- Visits to productive plants, archives and research labs.

Inherent to this way of working is the interaction of diverse knowledge sources and the integration between the technical core of the company and the cultural/educational soul of the Museum.

Key factors to the success of a partnership between a museum and a company are:

- Reciprocal respect of roles and skills of each partner;
- authority and ability of the museum to control the project and carry out all necessary scientific decisions freely throughout all its phases;
- Ability of the company to support the partnership through the involvement of various people willing to work with enthusiasm and to dedicate time and attention to the project, confident that their investment will benefit the community.

## **Values and Objectives**

Partnerships between companies and the museum are powerful alliances among motivated people who choose to work together to satisfy the needs of the community. It is a social, political and aesthetic process, given that understanding and trust are increased by the enthusiasm that grows out of working together for a common purpose.

Building support for business culture is key to cultural, social and commercial innovation. The development process of partnership is not only a means to raise funds for museums but it also plays an essential adaptation role, as it opens new channels for communication, networking,

reflection and positive criticism beyond the conventional limits of power, industrial expertise, culture and economics.

Currently, the process of asking and giving between cultural organizations and companies grows in a philanthropic framework of shared values (conceptual premise) and objectives (real and measurable goals).

This first aspect of the process can evolve into an understanding of reciprocal benefits. Museums need to highlight and underline these values, objectives, and projects through actions that may not seem obvious or easy to measure, yet such measures serve to bring the organization closer to possible partners and supporters.

This new way of perceiving partnerships does not merely seek out new opportunities and marketing benefits, nor does it try to burden the private sector with responsibilities. It is an effort to develop mutual understanding among culture, business and society, as well as a deeper understanding for each of these realities, which appear to have quite different rules, dynamics and languages.

The exchange comes about in terms of inspiration, learning and cooperation. Economic benefits are indirect but equally real.

The potential advantages for companies that can come from partnerships with the museum are the following:

- greater visibility, advertising for the brand, advancement of corporate reputation;
- expression of values and substance for programs with social and ethical responsibility;
- a dialogue with the territory and the community of reference in order to build a corporate citizenship;
- achievement of specific targets;
- improved perception of the company on the part of consumers and stakeholders;
- discovery of new approaches to communicate the product and corporate expertise;
- improved corporate atmosphere and greater involvement of employees and their families;
- occasions for organizing special events for important clients.

### **Testing the Partnership**

The next challenge for the museum regards the creation of long-term relationships and commitments. In this direction, the partnership between the Museum and Mitsubishi Electric is an example of how to cooperate in order to increase intensity, variety and innovation of the activities and the value of investments. In 2005, the Division of Factory Automation supported the development of the Robotics section through a financial contribution and the use of industrial robots with advanced technological content in activities appropriate for children (assembly of simple forms, construction games, and so on). Visitors can interact with robots through orders and instructions allowing them to carry out their pre-set task. The result was made possible by the cooperation of two different “souls”: the technical one of professionals and the methodological and creative one of the educational staff of the Museum. The success of the project was considerably enhanced by the involvement of the personnel during the phases of creation and development.

In 2008, three meetings dedicated to robotics were organized within the event “Fatti un’opinione” (Build up your own opinion), to introduce and describe technologies currently used in the various fields of robotics, discover their social use in everyday life and analyze possible future scenarios. Specific themes concerned the robots’ capacity to explore extreme environments, their role in the house, in hospitals and at work and the interface between man and machine.

In 2009, the sharing of projects of the Museum was extended to the Divisione Fotovoltaico in order to organize an international conference dedicated to climate changes. Among the discussions, the conference strove to distinguish between facts and effects, data and interpretations, scientific conclusions and ethical positions, changes and catastrophes, global strategies and local actions.

Currently, the Science and Technology Museum is studying educational projects on the theme of renewable energies.