



Ade Sawyerr and Maxine James - In tune with business needs

Building success within the community

After 15 years of providing professional guidance to other companies, a leading consultancy explains why it is still in business. Mike Best reports

It was more than just a mere coincidence when Equinox, one of the country's leading black consultancies, was launched on March 20, 1983. The date and ethos from which it borrows its name is significant to the organisation and reflects the aspirations of its two partners, Ade Sawyerr and Maxine James.

They chose the vernal equinox (March 20), which marks the first advent of spring, as the contemporary model on which the company would base its future development.

Fifteen years on, Sawyerr, who got a first in his degree in business management and has a keen grasp for commercial opportunities, says his commitment towards the empowerment of black voluntary organisations and business communities in Britain has remained undiminished. His vision is to see them prosper and become dynamic centres of change.

"During our 15 years, we too have experienced a lot of changes. We set up at the end of the first Thatcher government. It was a turbulent time for businesses and a lot of people had gone bust. Thatcher was just about to put into action her dream of building a nation of business owners," recalled Sawyerr.

He had the foresight to sell the idea that Britain's ethnic community could make a much more significant contribution to this country's development, if only it could take an active part in its economic transformation.

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To achieve this, the partnership lobbied a wide number of national and local government bodies which shared a similar view that the message was not getting through to certain groups within its multi-ethnic community. It was these tentative beginnings that brought Equinox numerous contracts to run a series of business start-up courses which lasted for three

months. For Maxine James, the managing partner, it was it was the ideal opportunity to put years of management training into practice.

"In our first few years, we were training more than 200 people per year and helping them to get a start in business. Over the last 15 years, we have trained more than 3,000 black people in all aspects of small business management," said Ms James.

The company has recently won a contract from Focus Central London, the Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) for eight central London boroughs. It will undertake a comprehensive survey of black and ethnic businesses in Lambeth and Southwark to establish why those businesses are not accessing traditional agencies for support and assistance.

Equinox said it has welcomed the emergence of new consultancies which will assist in taking budding entrepreneurs into the millennium.

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"Some consultancies have come and gone, while others have given the industry a bad image. We would like to see many more registered as bona fide companies in their right," added Mr Sawyerr.



**African and Caribbean
Finance Forum (UK)
and
National Black MBA Association (USA)
present**

