



Third generation auctioneer Bill Brown cajoles and boosts the bidding at an Elevate Auctions charity fundraiser.

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~ Bill Brown, Elevate Auctions

October 24, 2013 at the University of Calgary’s MacEwan Hall. The SBW Awards and Trade Show gives Calgary businesses the opportunity to display their products or services, discover new businesses and network with other people in Calgary’s business community. The award ceremony will recognize the nominated and judged ‘emerging stars’ of Calgary’s small business scene.

From all the categories and last year’s nominees and winners, the 2012 Small Business of the Year Award – presented to the Calgary small business who demonstrated significant business achievement, sustained financial growth and performance as well as exhibited service excellence, involvement in the community, innovation and a commitment to sustainability – was awarded to Elevate Auctions.

Although Elevate continues to shine in every category of small business excellence, the company also continues with a most unusual and unique edge in the Calgary business world. A key part of the openly declared Elevate Auctions company vision is, “We have a lot of fun and we love what we do!”

Elevate Auctions is a serious, successful, dynamic, exciting and an unusual Calgary small business. Their company vision and bottom line is: finding ways to help community groups raise money, creatively and effectively. From school groups, community groups and sports teams to STARS and the Calgary Flames Foundation, Elevate has staged auction events across Canada to raise funds for important causes like a cure for Lou Gehrig’s disease, supporting Kids Cancer Care Foundation, helping the Missing Children Society bring kids home, and many others.

The hard-core company logistics and the business plan is a wide range of services including online auction management, consignment auction items, a professional auctioneer for charity events, and support integration to combine an online auction with a live auction event.

The not-so-hard-core company rationale more appropriately captures the essence and the uniquely refreshing difference that is Elevate Auctions: it’s what happens when you combine an established and successful family auto auction business with a vibrant and genuine passion for helping non-profit organizations.

Although the company was both humbled and honoured about being voted Calgary’s 2012 Small Business of the Year winner, the small but wonderfully tight staff who make Elevate Auctions the exciting (and fun) success story that it is openly admit that they are award-winning entrepreneurs second – and a dynamic family business first.

Sisters Michelle Black and Renée Rothzén launched the business in February of 2009 together with their husbands, Matt and Johan, and their ubiquitous uncle, third-generation auctioneer, Bill Brown. “We do have a very unique business model and, sometimes, what we do takes a bit of explaining. We built a brand and a reputation in the community but, no doubt about it, a lot of our recent growth and success is due to last year’s Small Business Week recognition. Not only the exposure it gave us,” Brown says, “but Small Business Week is such a terrific opportunity to brainstorm, compare notes with other small business owners and learn from the panel discussions.”

Using their collective experience, the family created the only professional auction management service in Calgary. But their combined tech-savvy was in the right business at the right time and also boosted their rank as award-winning entrepreneurs.

“Hey! I’m 53 but I am so gung-ho about our online auctions and about social messaging like Facebook and Twitter,” Brown says with an excited chuckle. “I’m from a traditional auction background but we also want to reach contemporary groups and online is a powerful tool.”

“Online auctions are an easy and cost-effective way to raise funds. In addition to saving time and money, online auctions attract a wider audience,” explains Michelle Black, who looks after much of Elevate’s sales and marketing strategy, “from large charity organizations as well as local sports teams and home and school associations.”

“We try to have fun while doing the serious business of fundraising,” Brown says. “Our spotters work the floor and they are more entertainers than bid collectors. It’s always about getting the highest bid for the charity but it’s still a kick auctioning off Sidney Crosby jerseys and two Rolling Stones guitars that raised \$18,000 for the Children’s Hospital...”

All in a day’s work for the unusual (and fun) 2012 Small Business of the Year. **BIC**