



Entrepreneurs Pursue Passion and Profits

For many entrepreneurs, their businesses chronicle an intense history of highs and lows on the way to success. Most of all they are stories of passion.

Passion and a high tolerance for risk taking define the soul of an entrepreneur. Sustained by self-confidence, persistence and flexibility, entrepreneurs will take an idea and run with it -- frequently to the bank. Sometimes there's a detour, but along the way the successful entrepreneur nearly always picks up a better idea. Their nascent operation benefits as a result, or another new business is born.

Every year since 1997, the Spirit of Enterprise Center at the W. P. Carey School of Business has recognized a handful of Arizona companies and entrepreneurs that embody ethics, energy and excellence in entrepreneurship. The Spirit of Enterprise Awards™ are presented to companies with a record of profitability, outstanding customer service, and a demonstrated commitment to learning and education in the workplace. Most importantly, companies that qualify for a Spirit of Enterprise Award™ must also display innovation and creativity in business solutions.

A sampling of last year's award recipients yields examples of the passion, risk taking, persistence and creativity that enliven the soul of a true entrepreneur.

AIR Marketing's success based on analytical creativity

If there's a secret to the success of AIR Marketing, according to agency president and founder Elaine Ralls, it is that "our incentives are aligned with our clients. We succeed by growing our client's business." If so, AIR clients are doing well indeed. AIR Marketing tracks a growth rate that averages more than 50 percent annually. The company received Spirit's 2006 *Monster Entrepreneur ASU Alumni Award*.

The agency differentiates itself through its analytical research approach. Most marketing agencies begin by developing a creative solution to a client's specific challenge. AIR Marketing, however, begins with data. Leveraging an in-house team of statisticians, database programmers and analysts, the agency melds analytics with their creative work, delivering campaigns that produce demonstrable, measurable results.

Tracking and using every available metric is key to their success, Ralls explained. "Measuring the results of campaigns with business metrics, and being nimble in making changes that increase the marketing ROI are critical."

AIR uses a proprietary, trademarked suite of automated tools. Cyclone™ combines sophisticated mapping, and demographic and psychographic profiling, to model clients' current and potential customers. Cyclone™ also tracks and reports data from specific customers as well as from control groups and seed lists, so that responses can be measured against ROI.

This data-driven marketing technology helps inform the creative professionals

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at AIR Marketing. For example, an analysis of the ways in which guests take advantage of the different services and options possible at the Inverness Hotel and Conference Center in Denver, Colo. led to the creation of an integrated campaign. Print advertising, direct marketing, e-mail and the call center combined to yield an increase of 2,200 room nights -- which translated into around \$350,000 in revenue.

For clients like this, Cyclone™ profiles the customer base, identifies need periods, and helps determine what offers might be most effective. The profiles also help determine what tactics will be most effective in motivating response.

This kind of measurable success has helped AIR Marketing develop trust and confidence in the company's work among clients, Ralls says.

Spirit of teamwork drives Complete Print Shop success

Lam Bui left Vietnam in 1975, a young law student who'd been an officer in the South Vietnamese Airborne corps. But when he arrived in Phoenix, he had a simple perspective: "I work."

In 1979 Bui set up Complete Print Shop, Inc. in a 1,200 square foot work space with \$600 cash, one employee and two small printing presses. Today, more than two dozen employees work two shifts in a 26,000 square foot print shop that handles everything from simple prepress to folding and binding, mostly for other print shops. Complete Print Shop was the 2006 recipient of Spirit's *Rich Dad Special Achievement in Entrepreneurship Award*.

The early years weren't easy.

"To me, it was quite hard," Bui says now. Although fluent in French, he arrived in America with little English proficiency. "The language barrier was a real adversity I had to overcome," he said. "It was a different culture, too, and people ... I had to prove to people I could do the job. I had to earn their trust."

He succeeded because of an overwhelming allegiance to his customers, he believes. "I work with my employees to be sure we all believe we can do what the client needs, but I am so lucky and so proud to have people who believe, like me, that we are here to do whatever it takes to meet our customer's need."

Some of Bui's employees have now worked with him for 20 years and longer, allowing him to admit, "It's no one-man hero show!"

His philosophy of work has always been to "Be sincere, be truthful with everyone who works with you. Your employees spend the best part of their day with you!"

Bui made a decision early on to work toward creating a family-like atmosphere in his business. That means he talks daily with his team, and not just about work. He eats his brown bag lunch with employees -- it's a time the entire workforce can share concerns and air issues about current jobs and about themselves.

"It's a real spirit of teamwork," Bui said. "We're all committed to doing the best job we can and delivering a job when the customer needs it."

Bui himself is an outstanding example of the entrepreneur's persistence and confidence that there will be a way to do the job that needs to be done, all

the while taking time to create a strongly bonded team. It's the team that's key to long-term success.

A "green" landscape company focused on strong relationships

Landscape companies, according to John Holbert, vice president of DLC Resources, Inc., are considered relatively unsophisticated, blue-collar enterprises.

"Usually, we're not recognized as being especially innovative in approach, or in use of advanced technology," he said. That's partly why the entire company is "extremely proud to be associated with the Spirit of Enterprise Award. It's a huge honor for us." DLC Resources, Inc. received the 2006 *Edward Jones Spirit of Enterprise Award*.

A commercial landscape company, DLC Resources currently works with 29 master-planned communities throughout the Phoenix metro area. The company works at establishing close ties with each homeowners' association and its residents.

"Other companies may have 300 contracts," Holbert said. But, he observed, "that often turns into a kind of revolving door. We believe that each community needs to be a good fit for us."

The company's founders, he said, began building a culture of communication from the very beginning, in 1989. "We know we need to have good relationships with our clients, our vendors, and our employees, and each is equally important to nurture."

The company takes a proactive approach to building solid relationships with their clients. "It's part of our culture. We want to be experts in the various kinds of landscaping in our communities -- how we can best work together to maintain landscaping that works for them and our region -- and that takes time."

"There are hundreds of [different] trees, thousands of plants," he explained. "It takes an innovative approach with technology and creativity to manage the landscapes well, and it requires a partnership with the communities."

DLC Resources maps and tracks every critical tree, bush and planting for every client landscape, using a database system linked to GIS technology.

This allows the company to quantify each client's landscape assets, calculate the value, design care programs attached to annual budgets, and track and record results. Practices can be tailored to specific needs within each landscape.

In striving to be environmentally responsible, the company works to develop water management programs that allow for sufficient water to keep landscapes healthy, while economizing on usage. They program watering, and rigorously track usage so that water is kept at "just right" levels for various plant varieties.

The company also replaces all two-cycle power equipment annually, thereby gaining additional efficiencies in fuel and emission reduction. They've recently downsized the company car fleet to Hondas, and now own three hybrids. They'll add more as other cars need to be replaced, Holbert said.

"We intend to be industry leaders in environmental awareness," he added.

Holbert said that it's critical for small businesses to "know what you're best at, stay focused, and remember your employees are your most important asset. You need to support them, mentor them, and provide good leadership. It pays huge dividends."

Bottom Line:

- An entrepreneurial spirit begins with an idea and a passion, requires persistence and a willingness to take risks and remain optimistic. Entrepreneurs are both innovative and creative and have an uncanny ability to remain focused.
- Successful entrepreneurs place high value on integrity and ethics in their dealings with clients, vendors and employees.
- Building a professional, committed team takes time and effort, but provides entrepreneurs with the assurance that their business will be able to meet and frequently exceed client needs and expectations.
- Some entrepreneurs are born, but most are made from a combination of persistence and determination coupled with a willingness to take risks with ideas that drive them.
- Spirit of Enterprise 2007 recipients will be honored at the Spirit of Enterprise luncheon on September 26.

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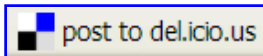


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