

# Outstanding Advice

BUSINESS AWARD WINNERS  
SHARE THEIR SECRETS  
FOR SUCCESS



The winners of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce 2007 Outstanding Business Awards pose for a group shot during the chamber gala in April.

Everyone loves a winner. Not only do they become role models, but often they have overcome obstacles that provide a road map for the rest of us. So when the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce announced the 2007 Outstanding Business Award winners in April, *Biz* magazine decided to do more than simply cover the event and repeat who those winners were. We asked them how they overcame their biggest challenges. Here are their answers:

## OUTSTANDING ADVICE

### SMALL BUSINESS:

#### MABEL'S LABELS INC.

Mabel's Labels Inc. sells labels on-line, through fundraisers and summer camps. The company employs 14 full-time staff to ship labels all over the world. Their latest products include Stationery Kits for kids and clothing labels that require no sewing and ironing. They were honoured as the Canadian Mompreneurs of the Year. Julie Cote, partner, responds:

#### What was your biggest business challenge?

We have been in business for just over five years and we are growing quickly. As business owners, our roles are constantly changing because of this growth. But it is very easy to get sidetracked by working "in" the business and not "on" the business. We have so many areas that need attention: preparing advertisements, making labels, keeping customers happy, training staff, replying to email – all this makes it difficult to justify the time it takes to engage in strategic thinking and business development.

We are passionate about our customers, staff and product – but we must keep our minds on future-building activities. We always have to be thinking 12 months out. That is difficult to do when there's a new fire on your desk every morning.

#### How could that event/direction have changed your company?

We had to commit to setting aside time to really concentrate on strategic planning and business development. We now separate our meetings to focus on either strategy or operational issues. Strategic planning retreats are held annually as a means of getting away from the operational side of the business to allow us to focus on the bigger issues, challenges and opportunities that face a growing business.

#### How did you overcome that challenge?

We have looked for business mentors and tapped into a lot of resources. We have a network and we use it. Whenever we are faced with new issues, we do not hesitate to seek out help and guidance. Our network is strong and the guidance we have received has been sound.

#### What is your secret to success?

There are several reasons we have felt successful. First and foremost, we are doing what we love. There are four business partners who together have a fantastic range of knowledge that we've been able to apply to the business.

As business owners, we are committed to Mabel's Labels and we have a team of amazing and loyal staff whose contributions are endless. Our products are innovative and fun and we recognize that our customers are at the heart of our business. We have been willing to take risks, and for small businesses that is a hard step to take.