

SME 300 Awards

Vets Now, Canongate Books, Balhousie Care Group and Prosource IT receive the judges' plaudits, writes

Donald Forsyth.

AT the end of 2009 SMEs gathered to attend the SME300 Awards in Glasgow. The event recognised the achievements of Scotland's best performing companies with turnover between £5m and £20m. It succeeds the E250 awards which have been running for the past two years. Partners from Scott-Moncrieff visited nominated SMEs throughout Scotland with the Caledonian University research team to provide background reports and analysis for the judging panel.

It was a wonderful evening for Vets Now who received two awards on the night. Richard Dixon, who founded the Vets Now in 2001, won recognition for Best Leadership and picked up the award for best overall SME with Vets Now being named SME300 Company of the Year.

Vets Now's core service is providing veterinary care out-of-hours which it does for over 350 veterinary practices. Based in Dunfermline and employing over 300 people, the firm is also looking at the potential to expand overseas.

Another SME that has achieved great success in the past year was Canongate Books. Also winning two awards on the night, the Edinburgh publishers picked up the Most Focussed SME and Fastest Growing SME awards. Jamie Byng, Chief Executive, is the driving force behind the firm that has had successes through publishing *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel, which won the Man Booker prize in 2002 and from publishing books by Barack Obama. Since becoming President of the United States sales of Barack Obama's books *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*, which Canongate Books published while he was a Lawyer, have doubled Canongate's annual turnover.

Winning Best Medium Sized SME and Best Employer, Aberdeen firm Prosource IT were another company picking up two awards. Formed in 2003, Prosource IT are an IT infrastructure services company that specialise in providing support and project services to corporate clients in the Oil & Gas,



transport, utilities, manufacturing, entertainment, and finance industries and employ over 200 people across the UK and US.

As an employer they say the reason for their success is a minimum of red tape and maximum freedom for employees to do their job. Along with this their management structure is kept flat. The result of this is staff are proud to work for them and they have a high staff retention rate.

The final judged award, Best Small SME, went to Balhousie Care Group who currently operate twenty care facilities providing residential care for more than seven hundred residents across a growing portfolio of new build and mature care homes. These homes make Balhousie the largest independent provider of residential care in Scotland. The award recognised the company's continual effort to improve living standards for residents.

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Winning Best SME 300 Newcomer of the Year was the fund manager Edinburgh Partnership. This award is given to companies who are new to the SME300 and who appear to the judges to have great potential for future growth. Although only founded six years ago, it is already a highly respected investment house.

The SME300 Awards recognise the success that companies and individual's have achieved from hard work and entrepreneurialism, made all the more rewarding due to the challenging times facing SMEs. 2010 will be an interesting year for SMEs as the competition for contracts, especially those in the Public Sector, becomes more competitive. And yet while these changes are taking place the SME business leaders will be continuing to focus on their priorities of managing cash, managing staff, eliminating waste, maximising efficiency, focusing on customers' needs and working on new business opportunities.

It has again been fascinating and insightful to review the companies nominated for the SME 300 Awards.

Below: Stewart MacDonald presents the Vets Now leadership team with the SME 300 Company of the Year award.



Below: Paul Renz presents the Most Focussed SME 300 Award to Cannongate Books.



Centre: Gareth Magee presents the Best Small SME 300 Award to Balhousie Care Group.



Bottom: Donald Forsyth addresses the audience at the Awards.



There is a terrific range of companies in this competition, reflecting the diverse nature of the Scottish SME business scene. Despite such diversity there are some common views that I encounter when speaking to business leaders like you. One of these is that many are 'running to stand still'. Although customer counts for most are holding up, everyone is spending less resulting in people being as busy as ever but making less.

There is also the view that while there are opportunities for new business, we've all got to work harder for it. Still, there are signs of some optimism about rising sales as we progress through 2010.

All of the candidates who entered into the SME300 showed great ability, imagination and enthusiasm and are worthy of our respect for their performances over the last year. ■

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