

A winning idea

Entrepreneur capitalizes on self-employment program.

In less than seven years, Carlos Cantu moved from being a language student in Vancouver to owning a resource centre for the city's many English-language schools. Like many who come to Canada, this transition from student to business owner wasn't in a straight line. But it is a common story.



Carlos Cantu, the entrepreneur behind EMCL.

Cantu came to Vancouver from Mexico to study language in 1977 and fell in love with the city. He returned to his home in Mexico City to study to become an architect, planning to come back to Vancouver to start a practice. Unfortunately, his training was not recognized in Canada without a required two years of graduate school in architecture and two more years as an apprentice.

He worked as a draftsman on short-term contracts for a while, but it was very unsatisfactory. In 2001, he approached Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) with a business idea and they directed him to the self-employment program called Toward Excellence, which trains budding entrepreneurs. Toward Excellence Consulting Inc. is one of the nine self-employment programs in the Lower Mainland that are dedicated to guiding people as they start their own businesses.

The 11-month program gave Cantu the confidence in working in Canada that he needed. He knew his idea was good, after all, his family owned a number of English language schools in Mexico City. His plan was to promote Canadian English language schools to people in Mexico who would be interested in studying in Vancouver.

"The self-employment program gave me the foundation I needed to start a business in Canada," says Cantu. "I needed to understand the Canadian business culture — and how business is done in Vancouver — and tax laws for my company to be a success."

Once his new company, Education Marketers for Canadian Institutions (EMCI) (www.emcicanada.com) opened its doors, Cantu recognized a demand for a service that wasn't being met. The international students who were arriving in Vancouver to attend classes needed reliable accommodation.

"I quickly saw a niche that we could fill," says Cantu enthusiastically. "Most students stay with families when they come to this city. But there

was no quality control."

EMCI screens the families who are interested in billeting the students and then matches them up with students coming to study. EMCI now works with all the international schools to provide this service to their students.

"The lengthy process to ensure a good fit for students and homestay families alike is now paying off," adds Cantu. "The company is generating interest for its proven ability to provide a personal touch."

Cantu was acknowledged at the 2002 Entrepreneur of the Year Awards (sponsored by the Greater Vancouver self-employment programs) by winning the Entrepreneur of the Year award for the "Other Industry" category as well as the Toward Excellence Equity Program Award for top overall achievement.

The 2004 Entrepreneur of the Year Awards will celebrate 23 successful B.C. businesses for their entrepreneurial achievements and contributions to the community: financially, culturally and socially. This will be the Seventh Annual Entrepreneur of the Year Awards, held October 20, 2004, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Vancouver. More than 500 guests including business leaders, government officials, community representatives and self-employment program graduates will honour the entrepreneurial achievements of nominees and award winners at this prestigious event.

Like Cantu, all nominees have made the transition from employee to business owner with the help of funding by HRDC. They are now independent in their own business and employing other people.

Basic requirements for entry to the self-employment programs are to have been on maternity leave within the past five years or employment insurance benefits within the past three years.

More than 5,000 B.C. entrepreneurs have launched profitable businesses through one of the nine Lower Mainland self-employment programs since 1996. Nearly all of the graduates (93 per cent) are still in business after the first year, compared to the national average of 30 per cent.

Inspiration 2004 is presented by the BC Urban Entrepreneurial Development Association (BCUEDA) including these nine self-employment programs: BCIT's BEST Program, Douglas College SE Program, Langara College's EASE Program, North Shore SE Program (NVCE), SEEDS, SUCCESS, Toward Excellence's Equity Program, West-coast Community Enterprises and YMCA (Downtown and Burnaby).

Past award recipients include *Modern Day Magazine*, 1-800-Got-Junk, The Gator Pit, Perk Street Drive-Thru Espresso Inc. and Urban Sunflower.

More details about the event can be found at www.beyourownboss.org.



Celebrating at the 2003 Inspiration Awards event.

Celebrating Outstanding BC Entrepreneurs

INSPIRATION



AWARDS
2004

Entrepreneur of the Year

Honouring 23 successful individuals exemplifying the spirit of entrepreneurship.

October 20th Tickets only \$40

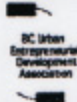
6:00 pm Reception & Business Showcase

7:00 pm Banquet & Awards Celebration

Hyatt Regency Hotel 655 Burrard Street, Vancouver
Join hundreds of new and established entrepreneurs including business, community and government leaders to explore more than 40 small business displays followed by an elegant dinner and awards celebration.

To purchase your ticket(s)
CALL: 604-642-6785
or visit www.beyourownboss.org
(click on the Inspiration 2004 logo)

Formal attire requested



The Canadian
+ Immigrant
Magazine