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IT company succeeds by offering reliable support

BY VALERIE MILLER

When Shelly Rounds and her company, Uptime, came up big in the awards department recently, it wasn't any surprise to the 100-plus clients of the technology-consulting firm. The service provided has been proof enough for them.

Making sure business customers get IT support promptly, when they need it, is the goal set at the company, founded by CEO Shelly Rounds and her husband David. The Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce evidently agreed, awarding Uptime the honor of "Innovative Business of the Year" last month at the Chamber's inaugural Small Business Excellence Awards luncheon.

"It was unexpected and very exciting," Shelly Rounds said, recounting the company's origins. "My background was in operations and management. David's was in sales and business development -- he was a Microsoft engineer. We were very fortunate to meet people (who needed Uptime's) services."

Good fortune helped but hard work played its part, too. Launched in 2001 with \$50,000 in start-up capital, Uptime counted \$2 million in revenue last year and is projecting \$15 million this year. The way Rounds remembers it, Uptime filled a niche that was woefully underserved in the Las Vegas market.

A California transplant, Rounds moved here 11 years ago and was surprised by what she considered a lack of reliability among computer-consulting firms. "Las Vegas prides itself on hospitality and gaming for the tourists, but small business had become accustomed to poor customer service," the Uptime CEO maintained. "A lot of companies had to go outside to get (computer) back-up help. Microsoft would have to recommend a company in Phoenix or California."

Enter Uptime, and Shelly and David Rounds. The company established a mantra of not making businesses wait for a day or more for its computer troubleshooters to arrive. In the past, according to Mr. Rounds' better half, Las Vegas firms would sometimes not receive so much as a courtesy call from their computer consultants to say they would be late or couldn't make it that day.

A DIVERSE CLIENT BASE

Although it counts many of the valley's smaller businesses as clients, the Rounds' technology-consulting firm has focused mostly on mid-sized businesses -- those with 25 to 500 employees. The company's reputation has also nabbed it some big-name customers, including Business Bank of Nevada and the city of Henderson. The municipality was one of the longer jobs done by the Rounds' firm. "That lasted close to a year. They migrated from a Novell

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Uptime CEO Shelly Rounds, with husband (and Uptime co-founder) David Rounds.

system to a Microsoft e-mail system," Shelly Rounds explained. "That was for all their system employees."

Uptime's work with Business Bank was in a different area. "They have their own IT system but we support them with their projects, with their growth," CEO Rounds noted. "It's very common to outsource, or use a company, to support your IT staff." During the last five years, she added, Uptime has established a reputation as a reliable and qualified infrastructure support-and-maintenance firm that can also handle project management and business consulting.

AWARDS PILE UP

Like the Las Vegas Chamber, Microsoft has recognized Uptime's expertise. In 2005, Uptime became the first Las Vegas-based and locally owned IT firm to become a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner with three Microsoft-designated competencies. Uptime received the Microsoft Best Practices Award for Excellence in Competency and is ranked among the top 25 nationwide for Microsoft Partner, based on customer satisfaction.

The company has just branched out beyond technology consulting and into recruiting. Rounds opened an office of Uptime Recruiting Inc., or URI, in Chicago last August. Another such branch opening is planned for the fourth quarter and more are in the works. "We are looking at six different locations," Shelly Rounds said. She calls the recruiting business as a natural extension of Uptime. "It was a very good fit with our resources and our management team. We are recruiting for administrative partners and executive positions nationwide, and we can still bring them here."

While ramping up that part of Uptime, Shelly Rounds might want to build a new trophy case as well.

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