

Entrepreneur Of The Year 2005 Regional Winners



Leonard Lavin
Alberto-Culver
Company
Melrose Park,
Illinois

After working for several years marketing various beauty products, Leonard Lavin in 1955 bought a West Coast manufacturer of professional beauty supplies. He then dropped all but one of its more than 100 products, focusing on a hairdressing that had become popular with Hollywood studio hair stylists for combating damage from the sun and klieg lights. Three years later, Alberto VO5 Conditioning Hairdressing was the number one brand in its category, and on its way to making the **Alberto-Culver Company** the ninth largest beauty company in the world.

Television was instrumental to Alberto-Culver's growth. In the late 1950s, Lavin's was one of the first package goods companies to advertise on television, and was a force in television's development: he won court battles in 1972 and 1983 to force the networks to accept shorter (30-second and 15-second) commercials.

Today the company Lavin took public in 1961 is a Fortune 1000 company with \$3 billion in annual sales. It manufactures, distributes, and markets such personal care product lines as St. Ives Swiss Formula, Pro-Line International, and TREsemme, as well as household brands, including Mrs. Dash, Baker's Joy, and Static Guard. It also owns the



Michael J. Small
Centennial
Communications
Wall, New Jersey

In 1999, Michael J. Small found himself CEO of a telecommunications company with a lackluster wireless unit, a brand new, untested division in Puerto Rico, \$1.4 million in debt, and dozens of new competitors cropping up to join the ones that had survived the telecom crash. It was also modestly sized; it had been founded to provide service in rural areas and small cities in the southeast and Midwest, to avoid competition with larger metropolitan areas.

Small positioned **Centennial** in this challenging environment by tailoring to local markets and focusing on customer service. By designing its operations specifically for each region—different technology, different advertising, and even different management styles—the company is able to offer nimble, efficient service that stands out from the depersonalized, one size-fits-all mega corporations. Proving that happy customers are more cost-effective to serve than unhappy ones, Centennial customers' bad debt and bill adjustments are half the industry norms.

The expansion into Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic led revenues to triple in six years to \$825 million, and Small is confident that in the Caribbean market Centennial will be the first upstart telecommunications company anywhere

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Sally Beauty Company, the world's largest professional beauty supply distributor.

in the world to overtake an incumbent telephone company.