

Canada Post recognizes Tales of Triumph

By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Canada Post is currently accepting entries for the second year of its Tales of Triumph contest to highlight small businesses' triumphs during COVID-19. This year's contest was launched on April 19 and submissions to the contest will be taken in until May 14. Finalists will be selected by an external panel of judges in June and the winners will be announced in October. More information can be found at www.canadapost.ca/talesoftriumph

Eunice Machuhi is with Canada Post media relations, and says that the Tales of Triumph contest was launched last year during COVID-19 to highlight the many stories of small businesses across the country who triumphed during the pandemic. She says the initiative was part of the Think Small program that the Small Business Marketing launched in April 2020 to support small and medium sized businesses.

"There was an enthusiastic response from small businesses across the country, representing a number of different industries, from brand new to established businesses. Last year's finalists had an opportunity to share their experiences with other small businesses at a virtual event hosted by Canada Post," she says.

Machuhi says that the three grand prize winners from last year's contest were well established small businesses who needed to quickly find new ways to stay in business when the pandemic hit. They included a 45-year-old watersports company that shifted its business to an e-commerce platform [Ocean Sports], a restaurant that had been serving the Fredericton community for 16 years and continues to do so ahead of solely generating revenue [Caribbean Flavas Restaurant and Catering] and a physiotherapy clinic that has been supporting the health and well being of their patients for over 30 years and ensured its services continued even during the pandemic [North Shore Sports Medicine]. She says the criteria to determine the winners by the judging panel was based upon specific questions for each category.

"At this point in time, we cannot guarantee that the contest will resume next year, but we will still continue to work with and spotlight small businesses in communities across Canada," she says.

Any small business with less than \$5 million in annual gross sales is eligible to enter the contest. Prize packages include credits for Canada Post Parcel and Smartmail Marketing services, promotion on Canada Post digital and social channels, paid advertising and national exposure and a coaching session with one of the contest judges. The value of these prizes is up to \$20,000 for the grand prize winner and up to \$10,000 for the runner up. Nine finalists chosen will receive a prize worth up to \$2,000.

The judges for 2021 are; Daryl Julott, managing lead at Digital Main Street, Tristan Lee, small business marketing lead at Google Canada, Rob Bigler, general manager at eBay Canada, Sunshine Tenasco, founder of Her Braid and CEO of Pow Wow Pitch and Josee Fiset, co-founder of Premiere Moisson and entrepreneur, administrator and author.

Each category has one grand prize winner and one runner up. The categories are; Offline to Online (businesses that moved from brick and mortar to e-commerce, added new revenue streams, adjusted their marketing tactics or transformed their business for the digital age), Doing Good (businesses that go above and beyond to help others and recent events have amplified that focus, pride themselves on supporting others, strengthening their community and investing in a better Canada) and Breakthrough Marketing (businesses that have mixed up their marketing by creatively redefining the way the market their business thus generating increased traffic and sales). Nine finalists will also be chosen.

One of last year's winners in the Offline to Online category was Edmonton based Ocean Sports. Megan Plemel is the owner and says that she received the Canada Post email last year about the contest and was intrigued, as Ocean Sports' website was literally their

lifeline after COVID-19 hit.

'This was in August, so we'd had a few months to adjust to the 'new normal.' We had a very busy summer with online sales and were starting to rethink our business as a whole, focusing more on watersports sales online,' she says.

Plemel says it was a fantastic experience every step of the way, the application process was straightforward and once they got through to the final round and met the other businesses as Mamta and her team from Canada Post, it was a lot of fun.

'We had video interviews and a couple of Zoom events and I loved hearing about how the other businesses had responded during the pandemic. There were so many creative ideas and positive energy. It was just what we needed to keep going and continue growing,' she says.

When the Canada Post team contacted Plemel to let her know that Ocean Sports was the overall winner in the 'Offline to Online' category, she was overwhelmed. She says that as time passed during the pandemic, her team realized that they needed to be responsive and flexible to changes, so they took a 'take one day at a time' approach instead of planning far in advance.

'This was how I approached the contest as well. Each time I got a response that we had made it to the next round I shared more of our story and waited for a response, so it was pretty thrilling to get so far!,' she says.

Plemel says that she and her Ocean Sports team worked very hard to make the transition online and that it was incredible to be part of such an amazing group of businesses in the contest. She credits Canada Post as being an integral part of her businesses success last year, in that they provided the tools and services to help them reach their customers across Canada reliably. She says that shipping has become critical to their business and they're excited to keep growing and improving with Canada Post.

'The experience from start to finish was simple and enjoyable. We would definitely do it again! We have been able to improve our shipping experience for our customers with our enhanced relationship with Canada Post,' she says.

Angela Pollak is with the South Algonquin Business Alliance. SABA represents the interests of many businesses of all sizes within South Algonquin Township. She thinks the contest is clever and creative, and overall a great opportunity.

'I think the prize money is substantial and I see that it is spread around even to runners up, which is really nice. Canada Post is the lifeblood of communities like ours across the country, so I'd encourage participation,' she says.

Emilie Hayes is a senior policy analyst with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. With over 95,000 members, the CFIB is Canada's largest non-profit organization devoted to creating and supporting an environment where small businesses can succeed, through advocacy, providing business resources and offering vetted partnerships to deliver savings to small business. 'This contest is interesting and timely as a lot of small businesses have had to overcome some pretty big obstacles over the course of the pandemic,' she says.

Hayes says it's a neat opportunity and they can win prizes but prizes and contests are no replacement for government support. So, she is happy that Canada Post at the beginning of the pandemic cut shipping rates for small businesses, so actions like that are really concrete and can really help small businesses.

'These promotion campaigns are a nice addition, but I think at this point with the endless lockdowns and the third wave, it's been a tough and stressful situation for our members. So, government supports need to be boosted, especially for new businesses and also encouraging Canada Post to broadly support small business like they did at the beginning of COVID-19 with cutting the shipping fees. Actions like that are so concrete and can really be helpful,' she says. 'It may seem small, but for small business everything helps.'