

Retailer Profile

BY CATHIE BECK



The 'Go-To' Awards Shop

B & B Awards and Recognition

STATS

**B & B Awards and Recognition
Bloomington, IL**

President/owner(s): Dick Manard, CRM,
and Joyce Manard

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Specialty: Quality service

Philosophy: We want the presenter to be
as proud of the award as the recipient.

Five-year business goal: Continue to
grow our business.

What ARA has done for us: ARA has taught us great ways to run a quality business through hands-on training, and seminars taught by fellow awards professionals. We've learned a lot from them. ARA has also helped us to feel comfortable as members of the "awards family." Friends in other industries say they don't get the same feeling we do within their respective industries. Our industry is about, "What can I do to help you?"

Greatest success: Becoming the "go-to" awards shop.

▲ The staff at B & B Awards and Recognition in Bloomington, IL. From left: Dick Manard, Joyce Manard, Gale Olson, Ryan Sharples, Tricia Shaw, Larry Radcliffe, and Mark Harcharik.

Dick Manard, CRM, achieved his award and recognition business success honestly, albeit via a circuitous "telephone" route. The founder and owner of B & B Awards and Recognition in Bloomington, IL, Dick says that when his career path changed, he did too. "I decided it was time for a new profession because the telephone industry was changing," he says. "At that time, I had the opportunity to buy equipment necessary for running an awards and recognition business.

"It was good timing, a good opportunity, a good mix, and a very good fit for all of us, including my wife, Joyce and daughter, Tricia Shaw," he says. "Tricia's an art major and CRM, so B & B Awards and Recognition offers her a necessary artistic outlet—it's totally up her alley. She works here full time and so does my wife."

What the Manards do full-time is provide their community a wide selection of quality awards, all with the focus of having the presenter of the award end up as proud of the award as the recipient. Plaques, trophies, glass, marble, and acrylics for retailers are the B & B core fare, but the compa-

ny also creates, crafts and produces many promotional gizmos. "We provide an array of promotional items," says Manard, "and that includes just about anything the customer wants. We've done portfolios, cozies, magnetic clips, and pins, to name a few. Just about anything the customer can dream up, we can do."

From Home to Mall

B & B Awards and Recognition has been around for over ten years, and though the company is positioned in a well-trafficked shopping mall, the Manards initially launched the business from their home. "It all began in October of 1997 when Joyce and I purchased the necessary tools," he says. "When some other folk who'd been in the business decided to do something else, there we were. It was perfect; we purchased their equipment.

"We first launched in our home and that was fine while we did it, which was about four months," he adds, "and then we moved into a retail location, in a strip mall in central Bloomington. The location was very good for us and we stayed there for five years.

"Ultimately" says Manard, we needed a bigger space, so we moved again to a larger building. It's the same plaza, but more square footage. We like it here, and the cost per square foot is excellent. We're centrally located, but it's less expensive here than in some outlying places."

Not quite half of the B & B Awards and Recognition operation is dedicated to showroom—one that the Manards highlight with a credenza dedicated to their best-selling products. "We have 2,400 sq. ft. total space," says Manard, "and 1,000 sq. ft. of that space is our showroom."

"In the showroom we display a credenza that we put our products on, and customers are completely drawn to that area," he adds. "Some of the higher-end products there—like plaques and the piano woods, lazer-engraved products and glass—get a lot of attention because of the way that we showcase them. We also have plaques and glass and they are segregated to their specific areas, but we've found that people go to the credenza, no matter how we lay it out."

Carefully Chosen Employees

And all that space is populated by a handful of employees carefully chosen for the B & B Awards and Recognition work. In fact, Manard employs an engraver with almost three decades of experience in the industry. "We have two students from Heartland Community College working for us," he says. "They do administrative work and some of the engraving, layout, and assembly."

"But we have another employee who's a true expert," says Manard. "He does engraving and has done it for 35 years. When we need an expert opinion, we go to him. He's invaluable to the quality, the expertise and the uniqueness of our product."

Manard also goes to conventional and some unconventional methods to drum up clients. One avenue he has turned to is not only fun, but also celebrity-heavy and leaves customers "swept away" with the B & B Awards and Recognition business. "We go about marketing the company in a variety of ways," says Manard. "We'll do small advertising programs, like trading space in a hand-



▲ Not quite half of the B & B operation is dedicated to its showroom—one that the Manards highlight with a credenza dedicated to their best-selling products.

bill given out a play for advertising space. It works because it reaches a small, targeted audience.

"And we also do some bigger advertising and marketing," he adds. "We've got an unusual and

very fun event here. We sponsor something called 'The Celebrity Sweeper' at Illinois State University basketball games.

"The way it works is that, in sponsoring The Celebrity Sweeper," he says, "we get our sign painted onto the brooms used to sweep the floor at halftime and other breaks. They use the brooms for basketball, volleyball or any other activity that calls for sweeping. That's one of our biggest expenditures and it's paid off very well for us. We've done that for four years."

"Also, during the half-time, they announce The Celebrity Sweeper and the person chosen sweeps in front of

Continued on next page



▲ B & B is centrally located in a strip mall in Bloomington.

► Dick with the Hall of Fame recognition display his business created for a local high school.



▲ Another recognition display B & B created for Illinois State University.



▲ Awards displays in the B & B showroom. Plaques, trophies, glass, marble, and acrylics for retailers are the its core fare, but the company also creates, crafts, and produces many promotional items.

the baskets," says Manard. "The person doing the sweeping is sometimes a high-powered or well-known celebrity. We had a sports announcer from the Chicago Bulls in town and he was one of The Celebrity Sweepers. It's often someone associated with the community or the university—but it always plays very well for us."

Sending Customer Reminders

The Manards are also particularly savvy about attending to their customer-base, ensuring that existing clientele not forget their previous B & B Awards and Recognition experience. "We've done work for some customers for 10 years," says Manard. "They are delighted with not only the quality of our product and our service, but because we send them reminders ahead of their needs, six to eight weeks in advance, they are very loyal. They are true, repeat customers.

"It's that customer-touch we

provide," he adds, "so they tell other people and they then send us *their* projects. We end up being the 'go-to' people."

Included in that "go-to" reputation is local recognition and even business support from Bloomington area school officials. "We did a project for the local high school Hall of Fame," says Manard. "It's in the front entrance-way at the high school and it's a very impressive presentation.

"When we completed the project, we told the school that we'd like to put our name on it, so that anyone who needed similar products would know how to get hold of us," he adds. The school officials said they thought it *should* be done, that it was very appropriate for us to have our name on the high school's Hall of Fame display. So it's there and it keeps people advised of who's doing what."

Focused on Growth

Even though neither B & B Awards and Recognition nor the Manard family have immediate plans for expanding the business, Manard says that they are always focused on growth. "We don't have a big plan to expand right now," says Manard, "but that's always how we operate.

"We always want those who are doing the presenting to be as proud of the award as the person receiving the award," he says. "It's a great business and a great industry. We've met a lot of supportive and knowledgeable colleagues and that helps anyone trying to grow a company.

"And all of us who work here at B & B Awards and Recognition," says Manard, "always stay focused on continual growth, on continually improving the product, and continuing to grow the company." ▲



▲ Dick Manard with customer Larry Morlan, who works for Illinois State University's athletic program.

▼ Dick Manard has served ARA as a board member, secretary-treasurer, and as a longtime volunteer for ARA's annual Awards Program. His many contributions to the association were recognized when its members presented him with the 2006 Founders Award.

