

# AWARD-WINNERS WIRED FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

**Maureen Jordan**

**A**N electrician shocked business circles recently, taking out the title of Small Business of the Year for NSW and the ACT.

Other winners included a franchise operation that has enjoyed spectacular growth by understanding Australia's water restrictions, as well as a hairdresser who is set to make money out of educating other hairdressers.

Tradesmen have not exactly earned for themselves a reputation for customer service, but Sydney-based Platinum Electrical Contractors is redefining what the trades can be expected to deliver.

The company's mission statement sums up the point of difference: "We strive to provide customised, cost-effective and intelligent electrical

solutions, in time-frames that meet client goals to standards that exceed expectations."

The company now enjoys a turnover topping \$2 million — not bad for a business started by 26-year-old Joshua Nicholls in 2001.

In accepting the award for Australia Post's Small Business of the Year, the young electrician-turned-entrepreneur was surrounded by the majority of his 22 staff, most of whom had gone long on hair gel.

"Not bad for a company with only one employee over the age of 30," says Nicholls. "To win an award of this calibre up against so many amazing businesses is unbelievable."

However, the only unbelievable part of the story is how Nicholls and his wife have created a business that has seemingly looked at every reason

why consumers cringe with fear at dealing with tradespeople and have set out to do the opposite.

The electricians are trained to cope with a hi-tech consumer durable world where fridges carry computer screens, and an in-house administrative team ensures paperwork and record-keeping is of a consistently high standard.

"When you deal with Platinum, you are not met with answering machines, or unreliable tradesmen who don't return your phone calls," Nicholls says. "There is always someone to answer your phone call and attend to your needs."

"Our team members are at the top of the ladder in their respective areas and driven by a nothing-is-too-hard mentality."

Taking out the Getting Started

category was a novel franchising operation that has made a positive business opportunity out of a "negative" government policy.

Ecowash Mobile, based in Sydney, was started by Stewart Nicholls and Jim Cornish in 2004 by securing exclusive rights over what they said was "Europe's No 1 waterless car cleaning system". The business drives to the customer's operation and to date the pair has sold 25 franchises in a very short time and they know what winning the award could mean for their growth.

"To be selected in the top three from 150 entrants in our category shows the awareness that Ecowash Mobile is achieving," Nicholls says. "For Ecowash Mobile team it means that there is recognition of all our hard work."

But it's not just that — winning awards can also turbo-charge your bottom line.

Web-based IT retailer TechBuy, which last year won the Business Growth and Management award, has seen its turnover double in a year.

The Customer Service winner was southern Sydney hairdresser Jamie Carroll, who has been named as one of Australia's top three salons and recently won the Global Salon Business Award in London.

"Winning for customer service proves our service philosophy works — to be No 1 you have to train like you are No 2," Carroll says.

He has developed a salon business operating system based on what he calls "continuous education" and a multimedia education program called Envision Academy.