



iQ MAGAZINE

January/February 2003

Editor's Note

Meeting the people who make things happen.

By Heather Alter
Photo by David Braun



Getting to meet and learn from executives who possess tremendous talent and passion is one of the greatest perks of my role as editor in chief. It's a privilege to spend time with business leaders to better understand what they're doing to improve their operations and succeed using technology—and then share what I learned with you.

Recently, it was an honor to do just that in my role as a judge for the [Cisco Growing with Technology 2002 Awards](#) contest. The program recognizes small and medium-sized businesses that demonstrate how networking technology solutions can effectively address business challenges and drive growth. I was one of seven business experts who reviewed entries to select winners in four business categories: Sales and Marketing, Customer Relationship Management, Operational Excellence, and E-Commerce.

Part of my role was selecting a Grand Prize winner in the Sales and Marketing category. My co-panelist and I diligently discussed the pros and cons of each nominee, assessed the financials, and weighed all the information. But in the end, we went with a combination of our heads—and hearts—and chose [ScubaToys.com](#) as the hands-down Grand Prize winner.

I admit, the company has a lot of warm-and-fuzzy appeal—a retail scuba store in landlocked Dallas that also sells gear online. But its leader has lots of smarts, too. He took the advice of a group of diving students from Cisco Systems and installed a network, servers, and a router. He learned HTML in his "spare" time and built a Web site. Then the marketing smarts kicked in and ScubaToys added an online newsletter, in-store Web cameras to show merchandise to prospective buyers, and other marketing vehicles designed to appeal to scuba fanatics. Before long, ScubaToys.com watched its online sales grow to 70% of its revenues. Over the past three years, sales have swelled by nearly 100%. The story is hard to pass up—it's the kind editors live to tell.

In October 2002, we announced the 12 winners. I was able to meet most of them—including Larry Dague, the founder and president of ScubaToys.com (with me in the photograph above)—at the awards ceremony in San Francisco. What impressed me most were all the stories I heard about how, despite the odds or conventional wisdom, these executives got started with an online venture or integrated Internet technology to meet a business challenge. These leaders are committed, passionate, and convinced that technology will help them succeed. And they are right.

You can read about all the finalists and runners-up in ["Big Success for Small Businesses"](#). I hope they inspire you to keep the passion alive and stay committed to all that's possible with Internet technology, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit.

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