



Taken by tents: Regal's Gregg Chipman now thrives in the event industry.

# INTERNATIONAL INSTINCTS

Regal Tent Productions' Gregg Chipman builds business on both sides of the border

BY NATASHA GARBER

## WHICH NICHE?

"You really have to know your market. You have to know all its subsections, but, more importantly, which one you fit into. You can't fit into all of them."

## LOWBALL LAMENT

"When you hear of other companies that you would consider competitors and the prices some of them are charging, you wonder, are they just trying to pay a bill with that job? They're certainly not making a profit off it. That's frustrating ... and that frustration flows into wondering what that [client] is thinking of you."

## MAKE THEM EARN IT

"As a client, you should not be satisfied with a required quote, which is just dollars and cents. You should want to hear what a structure company has done, who they have done it for and why they deserve your business. I see companies where the overall project could be worth over \$200,000, and all they do is send one page with the tent size and price. For those clients we might put together a 13-page proposal with color pictures. That's not to say that just because someone makes something pretty, they're going to be better than the other guy. But if they are making that kind of effort, you may want to give them some of your time."

**P**LAYING THE NAME game has proven smart marketing for Stoney Creek, Ontario-based Regal Tent Productions. "We've had work handed to us because [the client] knew we did high-end, high-profile work," says sales and marketing manager Gregg Chipman, noting Regal's projects for fashion powerhouses Marc Jacobs and Ralph Lauren, among other luminaries. "When they know those companies are hiring you, it goes a long way."

Of course, nabbing clients isn't always that easy, especially for a Canadian company intent on expanding its cross-border business. Chipman says that much of his job focuses on old-fashioned marketing fundamentals, including building a brand based on service.

He starts by making sure that the company puts a manager—himself, the company's president or another sales representative—on every job for "every minute during installation." Having a higher-up available to answer client questions and address logistical concerns "lets the install crew concentrate on what they're supposed to be doing—putting tents up," he says.

Keeping tenting problems from becoming client concerns is another service essential, he adds. As an example, he points to the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh fund-raising gala in October, where a last-minute request for a clear rather than solid-white gable end for one of the clear-spans put his team to the test. With the request coming after the

tent was installed—and only 48 hours before the event—Chipman phoned his office and had employees work round-the-clock to manufacture the clear gable, drive it six hours from Stoney Creek to Pittsburgh and install it in time. "It was one of those things where you just do it, and you don't nickel-and-dime the customer when dealing with events this size," Chipman says. In the end, the gala raised more than \$7 million dollars and guaranteed Regal a role in next year's event.

In light of his success with Regal, which claims \$4 million in annual revenue, it is surprising to learn that when Chipman started with the company two years ago, he knew nothing about tents or events. "I had been in business for myself with a marketing consulting company," he recounts. "I noticed Regal was looking for someone to come in to manage their sales force and be hands-on taking care of marketing, and I found it very intriguing." Little did he know that within months he would be applying his expertise to such high-profile happenings as New York's Fashion Week and the Molson Canadian Rocks Toronto SARS Benefit. But now that he's had a taste of the industry, Chipman is hooked. "I can't explain how great it's been," he says. ■

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