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CASE STUDY

How young entrepreneur spotted a need and turned it into a \$10-million firm

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Sometimes, in order to grow, you have to be willing to change things up.

That was an early lesson for Trevor Bouchard, president and chief executive officer of QuickContractors.com, a Guelph, Ont., company that works with some of the country's leading retailers, handling their delivery, installation and assembly of products.

QuickContractors draws upon a vast, national network of contractors to deliver services for Home Depot, The Brick, Lowe's, Best Buy and Canadian Tire, among others. With revenue of \$10-million and a five-year growth rate of more than 4,000 per cent, it was tagged at No. 14 in Profit magazine's 2015 list of Canada's fastest-growing companies.

But it all started out quite differently.

Mr. Bouchard was a 23-year-old student at McMaster University in Hamilton when he decided to create a website in the hopes of promoting his window-cleaning business, College Pro.

"I thought it would be a neat idea to start my own site and advertise for a bunch of different trades," says Mr. Bouchard, now 34. "I wasn't very successful getting business for my window-cleaning business, but we started getting a lot of interest from customers wanting to know about the other trades.

"People were saying, 'Have you vetted these people? Would you stand behind them?' Not a revolutionary idea today, but back in 2004, not a lot of people were out there vetting contractors and advertising them online."

Recognizing the demand for such a service, Mr. Bouchard ditched the window-cleaning business and focused on creating QuickContractors.com as a referral site for the consumer market. In order to be recommended, contractors first had to be thoroughly vetted by QuickContractors to ensure they had the proper qualifications and good references. But Mr. Bouchard soon realized his business model was flawed.

“Initially, we were charging a membership fee for contractors to sign up,” he says. “It was a conflicting business model in the sense that we were trying to generate as many memberships as possible, and that doesn’t bode well for only representing the highest-quality contractors.”

Next, the company switched to a finder’s fee model: Customers would submit jobs they needed done and the company would send out three of their best contractors to provide a quote. QuickContractors would ultimately take a 5-per-cent referral fee upon the completion of the job.

“The problem with that model was that we effectively became a collection agency, so when the job got done, trying to get the money out of the contractor was sometimes challenging,” says Mr. Bouchard.

“We had done a great job of developing this national network of contractors, but we hadn’t found an amazing way to monetize it.”

Then Hudson’s Bay Co. asked QuickContractors to be a secondary resource for installation, delivery and assembly to customers in some of the more challenging geographic areas of Canada. Mr. Bouchard says the opportunity convinced him that his company needed to be the “master contractor” in the equation, controlling the entire life cycle of a job.

A new business model was born.

“The idea was that we would get the revenue from the Bay and then pay the contractor on the other end to execute the work,” he says. “That’s how we evolved from being an online directory to being a national installation company for major retailers.”

Mr. Bouchard says the company’s collaborative approach has helped win, and retain, large retailers. “Every time the retail partners asked us to take on something new, we weren’t rigid in our approach. We didn’t say, ‘No, we don’t do hot water tanks or garage door openers,’ we just added to our portfolio.”

Their database of contractors has also expanded as they’ve taken over national programs for large retailers. “We’ve been fortunate that they give us their existing network,” says Mr. Bouchard. “And we’re bringing our tools and technology to overlay those networks.”

Keeping jobs organized and efficient is a boon to QuickContractors' customers, says Mr. Bouchard, because disorganization and overbooking often lead to delays and higher prices. That's why he's seeking to "commoditize" the home industry.

"We have visibility into 1,500 contractors across the country, what their availability is, what their price is, what kind of capacity they have to take on more work or less work," he says. "That keeps us from [contracting] Bob who is booked five weeks out. We can give the job to the person who's available, and they're not going to put that 'supply and demand' premium on it."

Mr. Bouchard predicts QuickContractors will continue to grow through solidifying the relationships they have built and expanding the services they provide, including in the United States.