

COUNTS REALTY & AUCTION GROUP

Virginia firm shines in international spotlight

Awards aren't new to The Counts Realty & Auction Group. Recently, though, the 44-year-old company embarked into new territory: international recognition.

Competing against thousands of entries from advertising agencies, universities, non-profits and corporations, Counts' single entry won the Certificate of Merit for Excellence in Design.

This competition, sponsored by the North American division of Torraspapel, the Spanish press-paper giant, pits some of the best designers and printers in North America.

Bill Bryant, president of Counts, couldn't smile wider when the plaques arrived in his 15th story Lynchburg office. "This is a great achievement for us. This validates our efforts to give our clients the best possible advertising." Bryant has seen his firm's brand recognition grow with both a growing number of auctions and dozens of state and national advertising awards over the past few years.

"We've got a rich history in the auction field and a track record of phenomenal local results," says Bryant, whose company employs four past presidents of the Virginia Auctioneers Association. "But we want to maintain our place at the leading edge of the industry." Counts' strategy has included the addition of more auction managers and offices in more key cities, as well as joint venture partnerships across the commonwealth.

In addition to auction marketing, Counts has expanded its traditional brokerage with Counts Realty Group, which specializes in premium subdivision development and high-end rural residential listings. It's also partnered in the development of its own title company to streamline the closing process for its



Ryan George (left) and Bill Bryant of Counts Realty & Auction Group display their international certificates of merit



Web sites and new media into its auction campaigns. Ryan George, who designs and manages most of Counts' auction advertising, comments, "The Internet is growing more segmented. We can target specific buyers with specific

interests for a fraction of the cost to cover the same geographic area with traditional media. Mailing lists can grow smaller, saving postage outlays for more impressive direct mail pieces. Newsprint ads can be more image- and headline-driven, pointing interested buyers to our Web site—an information hub we can update much more quickly than print

auction and MLS properties. "It'd be easy to rest on our success and the comfort of our leading [auction] regional market share. It'd be easier to keep doing business the way we always have. I mean, it's worked well for us. But we have to keep finding new ways to draw attention to our clients' properties."

Counts is incorporating more

media."

George has helped Counts network with specialty press shops across the nation (as far away as Oregon), building a matrix for price points in direct mail printing. "Every commercial printer has a product or two in its wheelhouse. Once you can determine which projects should go to which printers, it's a win-win. They get high-efficiency business; we get price points and leverage our competitors can't."

Bryant adds, "Everywhere you can save time and money in the auction marketing process buys you more exposure somewhere else. More exposure leads to more public interest and often more buyer candidates—bidders made more confident by the competitive bidding." Summing up the subject, Bryant punctuates, "Confident bidders tend to drive sale prices higher for our sellers."

Counts' Torraspapel award is believed to be the first time that any American auction company has won this distinction in the competition's history. "By nature, auction advertising tends toward the practical over the aesthetic," says George. "Time constraints often restrict some of the high-end products and techniques that advertising agencies have available for their projects. Some may view this as a David and Goliath situation, but Counts has developed a streamlined workflow that allows it to produce a new industry-standard speed and quality in its advertising—not just in Virginia but in the nation."

"We're growing and achieving," beams Bryant. "It's great when all our hard work is acknowledged with something like this. It's exciting to see our team grow and each member benefiting from their contribution."

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