

NEWS RELEASE

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Survey proves local firm means big business – America II Europe ranked one of UK's fastest growing

Trail-blazing Stevenage-based firm, America II Europe, has been ranked one of the UK's fastest growing privately owned firms, according to a recent survey published in *Real Business* magazine. The survey, called the Vantis Hot 100, ranks the UK's 100 fastest-growing private firms by sales-turnover growth over a four-year period and is sponsored by national accounting and business advisory firm, Vantis.

The 2003 Vantis Hot 100 shows the UK's fastest-growing private firm is Welsh-based Sofas UK, founded in 1997 by Charles and Josephine Pugh. The Sofa giants achieved an average annual sales growth of 148.7 per cent, with turnover of £4.211m and profits of £201k. While local firm America II Europe, started in 2000 and directed by Andy Groom, was ranked 65TH in the survey created from data supplied by business analysts Dun & Bradstreet from a database of more than 2 million companies.

The Hot 100 reflects a broad spectrum of businesses, ranging from the traditional services through to 'lifestyle' products. Two debt-collection firms feature prominently at numbers 36 and 40. So, too, do a firm of scaffolders, used-car vendors, and a car-wash firm. At the other end of the scale, the Hot 100 reflects the demand for high-quality products, revealing fast-growing firms dealing in fruit smoothies, bottled water, upmarket mail-order clothes and computer games.

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Family-run firms are also clearly doing something right, as the fast-growing sofa company ranked number one is just one of several family firms earning a place in this year's Vantis Hot 100, including: marketing firm HBS International (ranked 20); home ventilation company Farmer Controls (at 27); packaging firm Medipac (at 30) edition and IT security firm Axcelerant (at number 58).

Many Hot 100 companies reporting significant profit margins. The top margin was 72.4 per cent, recorded by construction firm Flowers & Hayes, followed by anti-virus software firm Sophos at 30.9 per cent and IT networks firm Network Utilities at 22.7 per cent. Many are also sustaining their growth, with 16 of the fastest-growing firms from 2002 reappearing in the 2003 Vantis Hot 100.

Andy Scott, client partner at business advisory group Vantis, (sponsors of this year's Hot 100) says: " The Hot 100 common themes for success: focusing upon customers, hiring the right people and communicating effectively, prove that it is possible to achieve sustainable growth and profit margins, even in the current economic climate."

America II Europe Managing Director Andy Groom says: "Building a growing and profitable business is always a challenge. Happily, our business has gone from strength to strength and we are delighted that our achievements have been recognised in this prestigious survey."

A full copy of the results can be viewed on www.vantisplc.com.

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Notes to Editors

1. The Hot 100 is sponsored by Vantis. Vantis plc is the AIM listed accounting and business advisory group that specialises in helping business people improve the performance of their businesses.

Hot 100 companies must be profitable. Firms have to show consistent sales growth and are ranked by average sales growth over a four-year period. Ranking is based on the past four years' turnover, with the winner being the firm that secures the highest average percentage growth in turnover over that period. All company financials are taken from the D&B database. The data for this project was exported from the D&B database on October 23, 2002 and ranked by D&B.

The Hot 100 rules are:

- ◆ Firms must show profits in the latest accounts.
- ◆ Firms must start our four-year qualifying period with a minimum turnover of £250,000. That's to make sure the ranking isn't skewed by the mega-growth that start-ups are bound to see when they start from zero.
- ◆ Firms can't be a quoted company. Companies that have listed on the main market since their latest figures are included.
- ◆ Firms can't be a subsidiary. However, firms that are technically subsidiaries but which are, in reality, trading separately, are included.
- ◆ Firms have to be actively in business.
- ◆ Any company to which D&B couldn't assign a credit rating or could not assess its net worth was omitted.
- ◆ Firms most recently filed accounts have to be within the past two years.
- ◆ Firms can't have a turnover rise of more than 600 per cent in any one year to prevent skewing from restructuring.

A complete listing of this year's Hot 100 is available as PDF file, or available from any of the contacts listed above.