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IDEAS MAN ROB GETS A FIRM GRIP

Businessman's determination nets him £50,000

By Cara Simpson
 NEWS REPORTER

A DISABLED Warwickshire businessman has won £50,000 from the founder of the airline EasyJet.

Rob Smith, an entrepreneur from Leamington, came joint first in the 2011 Stelios Award for Disabled Entrepreneurs in the UK.

The competition is run by Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou – owner of EasyJet – the Stelios Philanthropic Foundation and the charity Leonard Cheshire Disability.

Rob, who uses a wheelchair, saw off tough competition to win the prestigious award, which has been running for five years and recognises the achievements and unique challenges faced by disabled entrepreneurs.

He was presented with a cheque for £50,000 at a

ceremony in London on Wednesday night.

The 36-year-old's business, The Active Hands Company, designs, manufactures and sells gripping aids which allow disabled people with limited hand function to grip a wide variety of items.

Rob came joint first with Huw Thomas, a 64-year-old disabled entrepreneur who runs PromoveUK which designs, manufactures and sup-

plies specialist slings used to rescue, evacuate and transfer sick, injured or disabled people.

Rob, who sustained a spinal injury after falling 40 feet down a cliff in 1996, realised there was a gap in the market for specialist equipment that would allow disabled people to live more independently.

With the help of his mother, Marion, he began to design his prod-

ucts and they set up the company in 2007. Sadly Marion was diagnosed with cancer soon after the company was founded in 2008.

Rob now runs the company with his father and sister, and they currently employ six staff to make the products.

Rob said: "I am absolutely thrilled to have won this Award, and would like to thank Sir Stelios, the Stelios Philanthropic Foundation and Leonard Cheshire Disability for making this possible.

"This news is a terrific boost to my business and will inspire our whole team for the future."

Sir Stelios said: "I would like to congratulate Rob on running a successful business and displaying the drive, creativity and determination to reach the top and really fly.

"The £50,000 prize will ensure The Active Hands Company has an important boost for growth.

"Today, Rob joins our community of entrepreneurs who are making a difference. I am passionate about encouraging entrepreneurship through the Stelios Philanthropic Foundation, working in partnership with Leonard Cheshire Disability on this award."



SUPPORTER: Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou



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