

Dallas Business Journal

Friday, August 15, 2008

Techno tenacity

InSite Interactive survives dot-com bust to emerge as leader in web-based marketing

Dallas Business Journal - by [Shashana Pearson-Hormillosa](#) Staff writer

Biggest Problem

Adrienne Cornelsen formed her Web-based marketing agency, InSite Interactive, in 1998. But the dot-com collapse that followed threatened to derail the rising entrepreneur. To survive, Cornelsen downsized her team and focused on satisfying established clients and building their word-of-mouth referrals.

A little more than 10 years ago, the information superhighway was just starting to see some heavy traffic. Adrienne Cornelsen became so intrigued with emerging technology that in May 1998, she launched her own Web-based marketing firm, InSite Interactive, at age 28. The company allowed her to combine her marketing and public relations background with new technology like the Internet and e-mail, she says.

"I love people and I love creative, and to me, this is the creative expression of the technology. I guess I'm a little bit of a technology geek in that way," Cornelsen said. "We got excited because we could make images move. E-mail blasts that you could send to 10,000 people simultaneously were amazing."

Cornelsen joined with other self-described technology geeks interested in exploring the potential of the Internet and found herself a pioneer woman in the world of the emerging technology.

"It was a process of 20 of us who were establishing this industry," she said. "It's not like other businesses that already existed. It was people working together to define the rules."

Support from those colleagues inspired her to start her own company. She had been working at the now-defunct Digital Communications Technology, which specialized in video duplication, where she'd started a new division specializing in shareholder relations using the latest technology.

It took Cornelsen six months of talking with friends and mentors, planning her company in off hours and getting help from what today would be considered competitors. She left her job three months before launching InSite Interactive and spent that time developing her plan, including who would be on her team.

InSite Interactive began with only one employee, and operated out of a storage room a friend of Cornelsen's had let her use. Because she did not get outside funding for the company, she used her credit cards to finance her dreams and waited for revenue to come in.

"I didn't feel like I had a lot to lose because I didn't have a lot of financial responsibilities (at the time)," she said. "I'm glad we did it that way, because it kept us from having too many investors involved in the decision-making, but made it to where we were living paycheck to paycheck."

Fortunately, the paychecks did come; within the first month, Insite had nine clients. By 2000, the company had earned \$1 million in revenue. But one year later, the dot-com bubble burst, and InSite was forced to restructure.

Within two months, the Web-based marketing enterprise went from having 18 employees to six. Those who remained with the company pulled together, working long hours to keep things going, Cornelsen said.

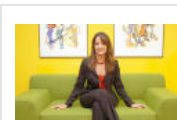
Team members relied on word-of-mouth referrals and cultivated existing client relationships by building on the trust they had already established.

One of those relationships was with Joanne Teichman, owner and managing director of Ylang|23, a jewelry store at the Dallas Galleria mall. InSite Interactive designed a Web site for the retailer in 1999.

"Insite and Ylang have really grown together," Teichman said. "We are the client with the second-most longevity with InSite. We have pushed them beyond what anyone else in our corner of the world has done."

Ylang's first Web site was image-based because Teichman didn't think anyone would want to buy designer jewelry online. Just two years later, the company asked InSite Interactive to enable selling capabilities on the site. Now, the jeweler is getting national attention.

"(Customers) all find us through the Web site," she says. "InSite really put the technology behind how I wanted to present my jewelry.



jake dean

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS: Adrienne Cornelsen says her Web-based marketing company lets her combine her interests in public relations and technology.

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“We want to get people hooked on our Web site and we do.”

The dot-com bust did create one positive for InSite: As competitors closed shop, top area talent become available. Cornelsen says being able to hire from those top performers has been key to her company’s success.

InSite has grown slowly, adding no more than two employees at a given time. It currently has 23 employees and offices in Houston and Silicon Valley, Calif. In 2008, InSite projects annual revenue of nearly \$3 million and is looking at expanding offices in Chicago.

Although the focus is marketing, the company prides itself on an ability to deliver the technology behind it.

“We have creative people and technical people that have found a way to make things beautiful and technologically groundbreaking at the same time,” Cornelsen says.

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