

KIRSTEN
OSOLIND

REINVENTING WOMEN IN BUSINESS

BY JOHN MANUEL

Kirsten Osolind '95 has worked in marketing for a number of big name consumer products companies—Procter & Gamble, General Mills, Coca Cola, Whole Foods Market. But none of those have brought her the satisfaction of running her own company, Re:Invention, Inc., a full-service integrated marketing agency for women-led businesses and the companies trying to reach them. Marketing is Osolind's passion, and improving women's earning power is her goal.

Osolind was born to a scientist father and a mother who worked as a special education teacher. They encouraged her to have a strong work ethic and to refuse to internalize failures. "Indirectly, they also taught me that it is tough to earn a living when someone else is deciding how much you should earn," Osolind said.

At various ages, Osolind tackled crossword puzzles, built model rockets, rescued stray animals, danced ballet, and participated in team sports (softball), drama club and the debate team. Research conducted by Dorothy Moore, an entrepreneurship professor at Citadel, suggests that women entrepreneurs were often closet inventors and risk-takers as children, and rarely stayed focused on one linear path as they grew up. "That is certainly true about me," Osolind said.

Since birth, Osolind has literally and figuratively been on the move (she has lived in 16 different cities). Between her first and second years at Fuqua, she interned for Procter & Gamble in Cincinnati. She studied abroad during her second year at the University of Bocconi in Milan, Italy. Immediately after graduation, she went to work for Coca Cola in Atlanta. She spent

time managing ethnic marketing for General Mills in Minneapolis, returned to Atlanta to serve as director of advertising and media for WebMD and eventually moved to Austin, Texas, to become the national marketing director for Whole Foods Markets.

Osolind says working in corporate America taught her the brass tacks of business fundamentals: measuring return on investment, annual strategic planning and operational expertise. She built her reputation working for Fortune 100 leaders and was influenced by several distinguished corporate executive mentors. But after 14 years in the corporate world, she decided to strike out on her own.

In 2002, Osolind founded Re:Invention, Inc. The company's focus is helping women-led businesses grow in revenue as well as number. Research has shown that women are starting businesses at more than twice the rate of men, yet only three percent of women-owned companies are million dollar businesses. "Women entrepreneurs need more than passion and creativity in their Little Pink Toolbox," Osolind said. "They need marketing, money and meaningful mentors."

Re:Invention seeks to help clients increase sales, build credibility, develop profitable partnerships and gain national media exposure through a unique strategic marketing process and team approach. The company is building a nationwide network of marketing associates, who are recruited, pre-screened and certified based on Re:Invention's specific standards. Once the associates are certified, they receive a seal of marketing excellence, membership in the Re:Invention Associate Rewards



FAST FACTS

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Program, with benefits from Re:Invention's 30-plus strategic partners, best practice industry marketing directories and tools, and active assistance with new business development.

Does Re:Invention certification hold meaning in the national marketplace? "We're patenting Re:Invention's certification process and standards and believe it offers a strong value proposition for Re:Invention's clients," Osolind said. "Certification assures our clients quality work and creates a profit-generating community of support for independent marketing professionals."

Osolind believes there is much that corporations and entrepreneurs can learn from each other, and one of Re:invention's core activities is connecting the two. "Big boy businesses know how to market for millions," she said. "They nail brand positioning first. They know strategic planning is the heart of marketing, and they believe in market research. They watch their wallets and measure return on investment."

"Small business owners have perfected the art of island-hopping—packing light, living low, and swiftly changing direction based on needs, news and impending threats," she continued. "Big businesses can get mired in hierarchy and politics before they can muster changing gears. Big businesses and their employees must learn to island hop to remain competitive."

Re:Invention also produces reports that shine a spotlight on trends in women's entrepreneurship. These include a 2004 gender-based analysis of venture capital investments in women-led businesses entitled, "The Venture Funding for Women Entrepreneurs Report," which was widely covered in national media outlets.

Osolind has developed her own credibility and contacts through countless sources. She wrote a monthly marketing col-

umn for *Entrepreneur Magazine* and has been quoted in more than 100 publications, from *Inc.* to *Redbook*. Osolind is an elected member of the Chicago National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) Board of Directors, was the youngest member of the 2005 Springboard Enterprises Midwest Venture Forum steering committee, chairs the YWCA Future Leaders Board, and leads the first Illinois Inter-chapter NAWBO Council.

Though claiming to lack any maternal instinct ("I kill plants," she said), Osolind enjoys mentoring younger women through NAWBO, YWCA and local university undergraduate programs. "I believe women leaders should commit themselves to mentoring aspiring women along the way," she said.

This year, Osolind gave the keynote address at Fuqua's Weekend for Women conference. Her speech was entitled *I Quit Every Day and Come Back Tomorrow*, wherein she offered her insights into the opportunities and challenges faced by women executives and entrepreneurs. She described five "mantras" for women entrepreneurs to follow: remembering a road map and learning to keep score (i.e. know how much you are spending and earning); knowing your strengths and weaknesses; surrounding yourself with people who are smarter than you are; focusing on expanding your territory and "isolating faces" (i.e. building coalitions, securing profitable partners, and creating advisory boards); and believing in your own ideas even when others don't.

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