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Webb Consulting gains ‘virtual’ success with global client

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LAFAYETTE - Riddle me this: What do you call a business with 12 employees who don't come to an office, a client that is a global powerhouse, one of this year's prestigious Lotus Beacon Awards and whose president spends her Fridays chasing her little boy around the house? This is Webb Consulting. Welcome to the new world.

President and Chief Executive Laurie Webb formed the company, headquartered in Lafayette, in 1996 while she was finishing a degree in pre-law at Santa Clara University. In order to pay off student loans, she started consulting for clients on the level of NEXT and KAL-Tencor. Before long, she landed global technology provider 3Com as a client, and the business began to get bigger than her alone. As of this year, she has 12 full-time resources, two significant partner companies and others starting to knock on her door.

She considers her success a reflection of her experience with Apple Computer, one of the most significant startups of the last 30 years. "The biggest learning experience of my life is the 10 years I spent at Apple," Webb said. "In 1985, it was a really kicking place. There were so many intelligent people who worked there who were the cream of the crop during its time. Apple was demanding, but it was the best of the best. I learned a lot." Webb started in the developer programs group and eventually rose to manage AppleLink, Apple's internal and partner communication vehicle. She also managed the migration process of users from AppleLink to eWorld, Apple's first online service built on AOL technology.

With 3Com as her largest client, Webb's team and partner Northern Collaborative Technologies have spent the last five years building and supporting the company's Partner Access, which consists of 18 secured extranet sites throughout North America, Latin America, Europe and Asia. The sites provide service to more than 125,000 3Com partners as well as 3Com's employees. Based largely on Lotus Domino technology, the project won this year's IBM Lotus Beacon award for Excellence in Partnering.

Webb also built a suite of online tools to allow 3Com to customize and update content. Basically, these



Mike Myers

Laurie Webb, president and chief executive of Webb Consulting, sits in her virtual office at her home in Lafayette with the IBM Lotus Beacon award the firm won this year for excellence in partnering. Webb's team and partner Northern Collaborative Technologies have built and now support Partner Access, which consists of 18 secured extranet sites throughout North America, Latin America, Europe and Asia. The sites provide service to more than 125,000 3Com partners as well as 3Com's employees, based largely on Lotus Domino technology.

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applications allow non-savvy Web people to create and post great-looking content on their sites, and it all gets done in real time.

“Information technology departments hate us because we put them out of business,” Webb laughed. In addition, her team provides 24/7 support for the servers as well as customer service support six days a week that generates nearly 200 e-mails a day from 3Com partners and clients.

The success of Webb Consulting is even more amazing when one realizes that every employee in the company works from a virtual office. Webb has employees based in hot tech markets like San Francisco and Austin as well as more exotic locations ranging from Las Vegas to London. She credits her choice in people for the success of the company’s virtual model.

“I’ve talked to a lot of other small businesses that have tried the model we’re doing and failed,” Webb said. “Each one of my employees is expected to understand what we’re about. If they don’t fall within our mission and values, we don’t hire them. If they do support it, those are the kind of people you want around because those are the people that you can trust.” Webb provides leadership through constant communication by e-mail, phone, fax and AOL Instant Messenger as well as biannual offsite meetings. She also takes the time to ensure that her employees have the right tools for the job.

“We continually upgrade our systems to ensure quick access so we can support the clients as if we’re sitting in their office. Our goal is to provide what we call WOW customer service. We’re our clients’ go-to people for anything that they might need. We really understand and know their business in

order to be able to support them.” Although the last year has been challenging for Webb Consulting, the company’s flexibility and Laurie Webb’s take-charge attitude has kept the firm afloat.

“I think the reasons we’re continuing to plug along, given the economy, is the quality of the customer service that we provide, and the fact that we can get pretty competitive when we

know we have to. After all, our employees work from home so we don’t have a high overhead,” Webb said.

In the wake of the IBM award, Webb has found her own role to be changing. She has started assembling an advisory board to help guide the company and hired an account manager to take care of 3Com’s day-to-

day needs.

“It’s a challenge to take the step of letting go of functions that I used to do,” Webb explained. “However, I have great people who can manage those functions, and now I have to break out of my comfort zone. It’s time for me to move into partnering and business development so we can leverage what it means to be an IBM business partner and be recognized as the best for what we do for 3Com globally.” Webb has high hopes for the future as well.

“I’m proud of this organization, and I’m hopeful that our strengths will allow us to weather this storm that we’re all in,” said Webb, who is in the process of sending the Beacon award to each employee to enjoy. “It’s not just me. It’s everybody in the organization and their commitment to this company. Someday, I would like to see everybody on our core team be millionaires, and I want them to have a solid stake in the company we’re building. Hopefully, in the next three to five years, we’ll get there.”

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President And Chief Executive,
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