



TECH STAR



Enterprising Woman of the Year Diane Kuehn

[By Akbar Ali]

Diane Kuehn is president and CEO of VisionPoint Marketing. As a highly successful and uniquely gifted entrepreneur, she has combined her shrewd business sense with a vast knowledge of technology and marketing to become an industry leader. She was recently named a 2007 Enterprising Woman of the Year by *Enterprising Women Magazine*, the nation's only women-owned magazine chronicling the growing influence of women in business.

Kuehn first contemplated the thought of a career in marketing when she received some exposure to it during middle school. She said she was also interested in the psychology of "presenting" products and making them appealing to her audience. She began her career with a small agency in Raleigh, NC, and quickly became enamored with how things worked in marketing.

As an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Kuehn initially planned on a career revolving around mathematics. Quickly, though, she grew bored with the subject and balked at the career options that would be available to her with a degree in mathematics. In order to broaden her opportunities, she began to take business classes and, in short order, discovered that marketing was both interesting and something for which she had a natural ability. The added bonus of having a positive cadre of professors helped her realize that business and marketing was her domain. She said that all of this made her say to herself, "This is what I need to do and where I need to be."

Upon graduation, Kuehn relocated to the nearest marketing hub of the Southeast, since she has lived in that region for most of her life. Atlanta proved to be the most fruitful of the available markets where she landed

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Play tennis and simply enjoy the time that I have with my husband and two sons.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Stadium Arcadium*.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *B2B Interactive*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. Don't have one...I don't watch much TV.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. I would like to fashion my life after three people whose names would not mean anything to anyone but me, so I will keep them private. In researching them, I found that they shared several common traits - they were entrepreneurs who founded and grew lifestyle companies successfully; they had very high levels of integrity; and they gave back to the community, leading others to hold them in high esteem. That is how I strive to live and what I want to be.

her first job: a commission-only position for an HR firm. To make ends meet, she worked as a bartender for California Pizza Kitchen. Despite the heavy demands of a schedule revolving around two jobs, it ultimately proved to be a beneficial learning experience for Diane. Dealing with customers at the bar helped her learn valuable marketing tools that she has since applied to her business. She said, "I think I learned more about using marketing skills at the restaurant than I did at my 'day job.'"

With the essential skills in hand, Kuehn moved on to a job at ADVO, the nation's largest direct-marketing firm which reaches more than 90% of U.S. homes and first implemented, in 1980, the "shared-mailing" concept that continues to be an effective tool today. From there, she accepted a position with a large company that owned 10 agencies. Kuehn was also an early proponent of using the Internet for company and client benefit in the mid '90s. She said, "I saw that I could leverage my knowledge with that new medium, so I pursued work in the online marketing field thereafter." Her ability to view the Internet as a marketing tool has helped VisionPoint succeed in its expert use of web design, search marketing, and email marketing for clients from a diverse spectrum of industries.



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Among her most memorable career accomplishments, Kuehn cites the experience of another company she started and of which she remains tremendously proud. Her project, at the time, was producing a publication for various NASCAR venues - certainly not an easy task, but one filled with enormous exposure and opportunity if done well. Within three months, she had launched the publication, sold ads, made vital industry contacts, and successfully published the first editions for each venue. Of course, the most significant phase of her career has been the creation and success of VisionPoint Marketing.

The NASCAR publication also taught her a great deal, namely about creating a start-up business and moving it from grounded idea to a fully operational and profitable entity. She lamented, "I still regret to this day that I closed that company rather than packaged it to sell when I decided to move on."

Many people have helped Kuehn on the path to success, and she proudly claimed to have had a great variety of business mentors throughout the years. She also named another surprising source of influence: her clients. She said, "My clients often end up being mentors, as I know their businesses extremely well and know their strengths and weaknesses, and we exchange strategic advice for each company's future planning." She further counts herself lucky for having been able to build a network of very able and experienced individuals in her area, finding that in the Triangle (a region of North Carolina), people are very willing to help each other in any way they need.

In order to achieve success, Kuehn proclaimed that assuming an active role is the most vital step: "Become active in your community, whether that means in the geographic community or in an online community of like-minded citizens. Become

active, develop your voice, and listen to others."

Aside from the business and technology communities, Kuehn has given a great deal of her personal time to the community at large, volunteering with The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, working for Triangle Family Services, a local United Way agency aiding North Carolina families and children in need, and serving as a board member of both North Carolina's International Affairs Council and the Me Fine Foundation.

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