



TECH STAR



Wendy Cebula — Collaborating For Success

[By Akbar Ali]

Overseeing a corporation's entire IT staff is no small task. Neither is managing its capabilities development team made up of over 100 software engineers. But Wendy Cebula, chief operating officer of VistaPrint USA Inc. can do both, as well as a whole host of other high profile duties which have earned her the reputation as an innovative industry leader.

Though her credentials in the tech industry are as solid as they come, Cebula confesses that she never set out to join the world of technology.

"Originally, I didn't [want to go into this line of work]. I started out as an analyst. Over time, I became interested in leveraging technology to solve business problems and drive business results," she says.

She attended the Rochester Institute of Technology, where she earned her bachelor's degree in finance. "It was a great experience, and while I was not a computer science major, I really liked the "techie" culture there. At the time the male to female ratio there was very high — that got me used to being in the minority as a woman in IT."

Finance wasn't the only thing on Cebula's mind as an undergraduate. "I try not to admit it, but I was a cheerleader during my first two years. I also paid for my own education and worked almost full time during college, which didn't leave a lot of time for sports," she reveals.

No particular experience affected her decision to move toward the tech industry. She credits her tendency of being results-oriented with guiding her toward a results-oriented role.

"I've taken a bit of an atypical path to get to

where I am at VistaPrint. I came to VistaPrint in the marketing and analytics department, but I was able to develop a niche for myself by leveraging data for making business decisions," she observes.

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Right now I am watching the Red Sox game. I'm a big fan. I also have two small children and enjoy spending time doing almost anything with my family.

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

A. Honestly, it is a CD of children's songs that my kids always listen to.

Q. What was the last magazine you read?

A. *CIO Magazine*

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *The Office*

Q. Who is your role model?

A. I have been fortunate to work with some phenomenal people. They have all been role models for me in some way.

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. My husband. He has a story for *everything*.

Before joining VistaPrint in October 2000, Cebula worked in database marketing and analytics for Partner's first, a direct-to-consumer credit card and financial services company. She also served in a senior management position at MotherNature.com, an online supplier of natural products and health advice.

She admits that while she may not be the most technologically proficient expert on the scene, she does bring a wealth of other necessary skills to VistaPrint.

"The culture and collaboration dynamic at VistaPrint has made my management and implementation skills far more important than a potential lack of programming skills, Cebula says. "The software development department of VistaPrint puts a premium on results, rather than actual programming. In fact, the software engineering department is called 'capabilities development,' a unit in which I served as executive vice president of before becoming CIO in 2006."

The premium put on producing real results for the company has led Cebula to approach her job with the idea that business improvement is both a daily task and a collective endeavor. She cites the example of the company's printing press which relies heavily on technology to automate and group print orders.



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“The orders are taken at 19 global websites, all processed at our two production plants, and can be ordered and received in as little as three business days. This allows us to print over 22,000 orders per day and provides a very scalable business model,” she says. We have also incorporated a design studio onto our website, which allows our customers to completely customize and design their own products, something that had not been achieved online previously. Our site tools, galleries, and matching technology — which allow customers to see other products with the design they just created so that they can see options they might not have thought of — are innovative to say the least.”

She adds that, in terms of IT, “We just completed a very comprehensive change in our data center operations by building a new data center in Windsor, Canada and moving to new servers with a virtualized environment. These changes are not only going to make the company more ‘green’ over the long haul, saving us substantial energy and money, but they also make us more flexible. We’re always looking for options that will allow us to continue to grow at a rapid pace, and certainly this technology move has done just that. While it was a large undertaking and meant reinvesting money back into our technology infrastructure, over the long haul it will certainly pay dividends for the company.”

Cebula has come to learn while planning these various projects that collaboration is

the key to producing the best solutions and that the preconceived solution is always the best one.

“If all points of view and all data are considered, then the correct business decision can be made for the betterment of the entire company. I think that these projects have helped not only foster those beliefs, but have also paved the way for bigger and better things down the line,” she affirms.

Cebula also recognizes the noted influence of several colleagues over the course of her career, notably VistaPrint’s former COO, Alex Schwotka.

Because he was an integral part of the company from its inception, “he paved the way for not only many of the technologies that we use, but also a lot of the culture that we have in the technology group. For VistaPrint and me personally, that has been very important. We work in an environment that encourages collaboration not only among our Capabilities Development group and Tech Ops team, but also the marketing groups and C-level executives.”

“Because everyone is responsible for the projects we undertake, the collaboration to get things done is almost revolutionary in this day and age. It was clear from the beginning that this was something that would prevail over the lifetime of the company, and it started with Alex. Not only was he a great

leader by example and an immensely hard working person, but he also encouraged innovation, collaboration, and drive. That’s why so many people have been with the company so long, myself included. It’s a great place to work and we have continued to grow and thrive at a rapid pace.”

For the up and coming professional, Cebula advocates an attitude of fearlessness as the best way to conquer their industries.

“The one thing that I would advise to young professionals is to never allow yourself to be regarded as only capable of certain things, and never shy away from a challenge. I come from a background in finance, but I found my true calling in numbers, analytics, and ultimately technology and operations. While I didn’t have a classic technology background, it was a position with what I would deem a technology company that got me started on the path that I am on. While I might not have seen myself as the COO of a multi-million dollar company by 35, I certainly never shied away from the challenges that were presented to me and my team throughout the years.”

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