



VOYAGEUR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Preaching Good Web Design

SMALL-BUSINESS SUCCESS STORIES BY PAUL NOLAN

👉 **Suzanne McGann** graduated from Luther Seminary in St. Paul with a master's degree in Old Testament theology—"All of the things you need to run a business," jokes the president of Voyageur Information Technology. But it didn't take her long to realize that the ministry wasn't really her calling, leading an organization was.

"I didn't grow up around business—especially women in business," McGann explains. So she didn't see a lot of role models for the kind of business leader she's become. "But even as a kid, I identified with running a church."

You might say that the Lord worked in mysterious ways to bring her to St. Paul-based Voyageur, where she's now the majority owner. After moving to the Twin Cities from Illinois for her seminary studies in 1994, McGann got a job with the nonprofit Lutheran Campus Ministry doing assistant pastoral and marketing work. That led to a job with the St. Paul-based Jean Thorne temporary staffing firm as part of a

marketing team that did Web site design for clients. Voyageur was one of the team's vendors, and in 2000, McGann moved to Voyageur as a project manager.

Then just four years old, the company did primarily Web site design. McGann and founder Dave Peterson proved to be a good managerial match for the fledgling company.

"I have a strategic personality, and he's a technical sort who is very customer-service oriented," McGann says. Together, they navigated the dot-com bust of 2001 and 2002, and she received a 30 percent ownership share in the business. But having survived those rough waters, both Peterson and McGann recognized the need to expand their services and reassess where they wanted the company to go. By 2004, when Peterson moved with his family to Colorado and allowed McGann to buy majority ownership of Voyageur, she was bringing her marketing background to bear.

Voyageur has gone **from a company that simply designs**

Web sites to a consultancy that helps clients build brand visibility and revenues through a comprehensive Internet strategy. "Lots of companies have the technical know-how to design a Web site," McGann says. "But they don't have the marketing skills to complete the package."

In most cases, Voyageur no longer launches a Web site and leaves. It continues to tweak content and design, especially to increase a site's visibility on search engines (a process known as search-engine optimization), and it maintains clients' pay-per-click ad programs. "You can't be a successful business without SEO and pay-per-click," McGann says.

Four of Voyageur's eight employees are Web site designers, two with Google certification that's particularly useful in improving search-engine rankings.

McGann says clients bring a more educated and integrated approach to their Web site strategies now than during the dot-com boom. "People are pretty savvy these days, but they can be over-

whelmed," she says.

So Voyageur works at making the Web easy for clients, including locally based Gelco, the Science Museum of Minnesota, and best-selling local business author Harvey Mackay. The company is also stretching beyond local prospects to snag accounts like Holiday Inn Express.

Voyageur has two full-time salespeople, but McGann says that at its current size, the company is "returning phone calls" rather than aggressively pursuing more clients. She **expects revenues of \$700,000 this year, up about 40 percent from 2005**, and she has yearly revenues of \$2 million as a near-term goal.

McGann intends to grow carefully, though. "I don't want to get so excited about new clients that I forget the importance of retention," she says; Voyageur currently **has a client-retention rate of 92 percent**. And she'd love to find an infusion of new money to spur that growth: "Our revenue keeps going up, but we keep investing in more IT."