

2009 Rhode Island Small Business Person of the Year

EMBOLDEN GROWS TO NATIONAL PROMINENCE

Rhode Island-based Embolden is one of the fastest-growing Web development and technology consulting firms in New England—predominantly serving large community foundation and non-profit organizations.

Embolden was founded a decade ago by Ann-Marie Harrington and has expanded from a one-employee operation to 15 full-time employees and several part-time employees and interns. Over the past three years, Embolden also has grown its bottom line substantially each year, despite the depressed economy.

Ann-Marie credits the U.S. Small Business Administration in part for her continued success. The company received its first SBA-guaranteed loan in 2003 and has since secured three additional SBA loans through Bank Rhode Island to support her business expansion plans. The company has continued to grow at a near 40 percent each year and was recognized by the State of Rhode Island in 2008 as the Minority Enterprise of the Year.

Harrington also credits her accountant, David Lucier, for providing invaluable guidance, particularly in the early years, as Embolden began to develop and grow.

As company sales have grown so has the physical plant. When Embolden opened its doors it occupied 1,900 square feet of space. Today, the Embolden operation is housed in 5,000 square feet in the same location, the historical “The Mills” building in Pawtucket, R.I.

In the mid-1990s, when Harrington was working as a research analyst and social worker at a non-profit organization, she discovered the Internet. Her passion for the worldwide Web inspired her to start a Web development firm, initially to help nonprofits market themselves online. Ann-Marie has built Embolden into one of the leading Web firms in the region, serving the large community foundations and philanthropic organizations.

Ann-Marie’s team includes employees with very specialized talents. They include project managers who oversee the client’s assignment from start to finish and make certain the job is done on schedule and on budget for the client.

Graphic designers develop the “look” of the Website while others are responsible for the visibility and navigation, which is really the blueprint of the client’s Web site. The programmers who are the “super techies” write the program code which makes the Website function. Content writers create the text for the site.

Harrington believes that an organization’s Web site offers the chance for interaction around the clock. They can tell stories, engage donors and potential donors, members and constituents, and they can do it with slide shows, video, podcasts and a variety of other tools that make a Web site effective.

Ann-Marie knows that done right, a Web site is a conversation, call to action, and an advocate for an organization. There is also a cost savings because annual reports, newsletters, and other correspondence can be posted to the Web site rather than mailing.

She encourages clients to use social media such as Facebook and Twitter to raise awareness and get large groups to attend an event or to donate money. Blogging is

another way to put a human face on an organization and communicate its mission or tell the group's story.

Harrington has created a very progressive work culture. She started the business out of her home with one employee, who also worked out of his home. They had no clients and today Embolden has 150 clients. The company grew steadily and walls were knocked down for expansion and additional employees were hired.

The company is a multi-year winner of the prestigious Alfred P. Sloan Award for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility—ranking it as one of the top 20 percent of employers nationally in terms of flexible work programs, policies and culture. There is virtually no turnover of workforce at Embolden. Most of the employees have been with the company for ten years. Ann-Marie has established Embolden as one of the best places to work in Rhode Island. She is a recipient of the 2008 YWCA Women of Achievement Award.

The Embolden client list includes Alaska Community Foundation, Baltimore Community Foundation, New York Community Trust, Philadelphia Foundation and Rhode Island Foundation.

Embolden is known for delivering knowledgeable, client-focused and friendly service. Harrington coaches clients in developing an online communications strategy, and helps them navigate the abundant technology choices to support the strategy effectively.

For her demonstrated success and potential for growth, the U.S. Small Business Administration is pleased to honor Ann-Marie Harrington, Founder and President of Embolden, as the 2009 Rhode Island Small Business Person of the Year.