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WOMEN in the IT CHANNEL

2011

Celebrating 20 female executives in the Canadian channel ecosystem



Carmela Orlando, senior vice-president & GM, Insight Canada

CARMELA ORLANDO HAS two roles at Insight North America. One is to be the public face of the Canadian business, based in Montreal. The second is senior vice president at Insight, an IT solution provider that carries more than 200,000 products and services for customers in Canada and the U.S.



Despite the fact that its parent company is one of the biggest direct market resellers in the U.S., Insight Canada had been unable to crack the Top 10 in *CDN's* Top 100 Solution Provider rankings. In a matter of just five years, Orlando grew the business to the point where it reached the No. 2 spot on the Top 100 list

in 2007. After climbing the ranks of senior management at the company, Orlando was named GM of Insight Canada at the age of 40. Before that, she spent more than a decade at distributor Merisel Canada, which was led by Sue Miller. Orlando left Merisel as a high-ranking North American vice-president of sales when the distributor was acquired by Synnex Corp. in 2001.

At Insight, Orlando understood that the Tempe, Ariz.-based company needed to be local and go beyond just product fulfillment if she was going to take it to the next level. Her plan was to spread account services across the country and give them the technical resources and expert knowledge necessary for all areas of IT.

The strategy worked and this move launched Insight Canada to the No. 6 position in the *CDN* Top 100 Solu-

tion Provider rankings for 2005, and eventually the No. 2 overall position.

Then came the Software Spectrum acquisition. From a Canadian standpoint, Orlando said the deal completed the company she wanted to build from taking the job back in 2002.

"We wanted to be a trusted advisor, and for me, trust is a word that equates with expertise. We have a strong hardware position and we dominate in the mid-market, but we did not have a strong presence in the enterprise space. (Software Spectrum Canada) really fit the bill from a software expertise perspective and they straddled both the enterprise and mid-markets. They were a shoe-in," Orlando said in a previous interview.

In 2010, Insight Canada made a big comeback from the downturn in the economy to produce excellent results and again be a force in the Canadian IT channel market. |

Monica Rok, president, Advanced Knowledge Networks

WHILE TODAY SHE'S THE PRESIDENT of Advanced Knowledge Networks (AKN), a Toronto-based networking solutions provider, Monica Rok said she didn't originally intend on a career in the information technology industry.



With a background in finance and businesses, including a commerce degree and an MBA, Rok began her career in banking. But as she got to work with some really interesting people in her client portfolio, she said she quickly caught the entrepreneurial bug and was eager to venture out on her own.

"My husband started an Internet Service Provider and

he's a techie, so he needed some business direction," said Rok. "I stepped in and provided a business framework, and it grew from there into AKN."

Her career path in IT hasn't always been smooth, but if it was smooth, it would be easier and everyone would be doing it, said Rok. The technology industry is demanding and always changing, which is one of the things that makes it a great field to work in.

"There's always another challenge to overcome, and every challenge teaches a new lesson," said Rok.

When it comes to gender diversity in the IT industry, Rok said she hasn't seen a whole lot of change during her time in the business.

"The leadership of our companies is still heavily weight-

ed toward male leadership, and in terms of the telecom industry, it's the same thing," said Rok. "When we're hiring, it's not easy to find women interested in the roles we publish. We hire frequently, and it's a challenge."

For Rok and AKN, the primary goal is to hire the right person for the job, male or female. But she'd like to see more women getting into the industry, because the right woman with the right focus can add a lot of value. She'd like to see more school initiatives which would lead to more women entering the industry down the road. If they do make the choice, an exciting career awaits them.

"It's a very challenging, dynamic and exciting environment. The change is constant and you can affect change," said Rok. "If you have the skills and vision you can affect change yourself, and that's not necessarily the same in all industries. If you're motivated, it can be very rewarding." |

Laurie Schultz, senior vice-president and general manager, mid-market ERP solutions, Sage

THERE'S ALWAYS BEEN something about customer-facing product management that has appealed to Laurie Schultz, senior vice-president and general manager, mid-market ERP solutions for Sage Software.



She's been in the software industry now for 12 years, starting with Intuit before moving over to Sage. Before software she worked in the telecom sector with Telus, working with customer-facing products such as call display.

"My skill set has come around product management;

I've always been kind of a customer-facing manager," says Schultz.

The industry was a little bit more male-dominated when she started out, but she says one thing worth noting about Sage is there's a lot of female IT leaders in the company.

"There are several general managers I work with who are female that have stay-at-home husbands and fathers and are the primary breadwinners. I think we're doing a pretty good job positioning women in leadership roles," said Schultz. "It's very unique in my experience."

While there aren't formal programs to encourage gender diversity, Schultz said culturally, Sage is a global company that has diversity of all kinds at its core, and that global

footprint and culture has perhaps made it a little easier for women to advance.

To young women considering a career in IT, Schultz said her career has afforded her a wide breadth of experience. There's much opportunity to gain skills in marketing or product management and be part of a global industry.

"I sell my product in over 100 countries and I spend a ton of my time outside North America; the ability to get a global experience and have a global impact is great," said Schultz. "I'd say to any young woman, just be confident and be yourself. Women are very good multi-taskers and that's a skill that comes in handy. Also, be very focused on delegating." |

Corinne Sharp, national director, partner network, Microsoft Canada

CORINNE SHARP MADE her foray into the IT industry when she was hired by Hamilton Computer Sales and Rentals as the company's first female account manager in its Calgary office.



She remembers telling Bill Young, the president, that she didn't want to be hired because she was female, but because she could do a great job for his company.

"Little did I realize I was paving the way for hiring managers to consider hiring women because of their abilities, merit and approach to

working with customers versus their gender, as others had done," said Sharp, now the national director of the partner sales network with Microsoft Canada.

Sharp grew up in a male-dominated household with her dad, a businessman, and two older brothers. What she learned was this: If you drive results and do your job with the right set of values and integrity, you will be just fine.

"Did I meet some interesting characters along the line? Of course. I still do today," she said.

"When I worked in teams where the leaders valued diversity and did not accept inappropriate behavior, all was smooth sailing."

Over the years, she's seen more diversity in all roles

within IT, which covers a wider spectrum than gender — and that makes for a more competitive, collaborative and innovative workforce. But more needs to be done, she said.

Microsoft Canada has created programs dedicated to, among other things, attracting, retaining and developing the careers of women.

"We're looking at ways to target technical females through our recruiting efforts and mentoring opportunities," said Sharp. For example, the company has established an internal Web site to assist with maternity leave; it provides resources and tools for career development so women returning from maternity leave don't lose traction. |