



DRIVEN: Sherry Michaels, president of Michaels & Associates Doctrain, Ltd., operates her business from her Scottsdale home. PAUL O'NEILL, TRIBUNE

Management consultant aims to boost productivity

By ED TAYLOR
TRIBUNE

Sherry Michaels' clients are real. So are her employees. And so is her revenue.

But her business is virtual, conducted mostly in cyberspace.

Michaels is the chief executive and founder of Michaels & Associates Doctrain Ltd., a management consulting firm that specializes in corporate training and software documentation (hence doctrain). Her primary job is to help companies use software to get the most productivity possible from their work forces. And she's able to do that without spending a lot of time on-site with her clients.

As a result she can accept clients from throughout the country — Ohio, Texas, California — as well as in the Valley.

"Our consultants ride the Internet to work instead of the freeway," she said. "Issues like space and system logistics to house consultants, flight delays, daylight savings time or expense accounts rarely apply."

Michaels' route on the Information Superhighway has led to success. Starting with just two people in 1968 and with one client — Avnet — Michaels now has 10 consultants on her staff and another 25 consultants that she can call on for specific projects. The company ranks as the 14th largest management consulting firm in the Valley.

Following Sept. 11, when most businesses cut their training budgets to the bare bone, the company has more than regained its footing. Last year was particularly strong; in 2006 her business was nearly double the previous year. "Now we have 300 percent more business than before 9/11," she said.

Her consultancy didn't start out as a virtual company. It just evolved that way to meet the needs of clients, she said.

"We're usually called after a company buys a new software system, and someone notices a productivity drop," Michaels said. She helps to develop training programs that teach employees how to make better use of the software.

"We can help them make that investment pay off."

Michaels, who works from an office at her home in north Scottsdale, typically will do an initial in-person interview with the client to find out what they are trying to do with their systems. But after that she and her associates might not physically go to the client's site for the rest of the project.

In addition to developing training programs that allow clients' employees to get the most out of the system, her firm also provides Web content and business process development.

Her staff includes technical writers, instructional designers, technical graphic artists, e-learning experts and business analysts. They live all over

Sherry Michaels

Age: 58

Family: husband, Fred, two daughters, Kristen 28, and Lindsay, 23

Occupation: Founder and President of Michaels & Associates Doctrain Ltd., a company that provides management consulting services including software documentation, corporate training programs, Web content development and business process analysis.

Key achievements: Founded her own management consulting business in 1996 and working as a programmer for a management consulting firm in Chicago. Today her virtual company can call on 35 consultants from around the country, and her company ranks as the 14th largest management consulting firm in the Valley.

Philosophy for success: Gets the best people she can find to work for her. "I want people with passion, people who want to make a difference."

Information: (480) 644-6440 or www.doctrain.com

the country, and one even lives in Indonesia, she said. All are proficient in the use of technology.

Clients include financial institutions, communications companies, pharmaceutical companies, even home builders.

Michaels said the secret of her success is finding the right people to work for her. She looks for people with drive and a belief in what her firm

is trying to achieve. She often recruits them through her membership in professional societies such as the Society for Technical Communications and the American Society for Training and Development.

"Ross Perot once said that eagles don't flock, you have to get them one at a time," she said. "I try to find the eagles. I want people with passion, people who want to make a difference."

And she believes she is. "We're touching lives and making them more productive," she said.

Kathy Crenshaw, training manager in the training and leadership development department at Avnet, a Phoenix-based electronics distributor, said Michaels is helping develop ongoing training programs for the company, including a course for new North American employees.

"I have a staff of three, and if (Avnet officials) need additional courseware developed that is more than my staff can produce, I hire her folks to help," Crenshaw said. "It's like having an augmented staff."

Michaels' virtual business model fits in well with Avnet's, which also has virtual aspects, Crenshaw said. "It's pretty seamless," she said. "When we need them, they are here, but the bulk of the work is done virtually. That means I don't have to pay them for space here."

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Ed Taylor | East Valley Tribune | February 18, 2007

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