

Exhib-It-ing Talent

DJ Heckes Makes Serious Business Out of a Walk Through the Trade Show

By Elisabeth Monaghan

Photo by Steve Bromberg - stevebrombergphotography.com

DJ Heckes approaches her business, Exhib-It Tradeshow Marketing Experts, with a hefty dose of optimism and the ability to change direction with lightning fast speed – the same approach she has taken in her personal life.

A member of several chambers of commerce, Heckes' reputation as a savvy professional has spread throughout Albuquerque and New Mexico. Her hard work and community spirit have earned her numerous awards, including the Maxie Anderson Innovative Business Leader award in 2005. While serving as local chapter president of the American Marketing Association, New Mexico received top honors as the nation's, 2005 Chapter of Excellence. Most recently, she was named one of New Mexico's top 10 women of influence for 2006.

Though her communication and social skills may have helped attract and maintain clients, many people believe it is Heckes' adaptability that has made Exhib-It a leader in the niche industry for exhibit design and sales. With six years of exhibit sales under her belt, Heckes purchased her company in February 2000. She says she knew from the beginning that she wanted to do things differently than her competition, so she changed the name of the company, hired an in-house designer, and opened the doors to Exhib-It that March.

Like so many other businesses in the nation, Heckes says Exhib-It faced the challenges brought on by the downturn in the economy in 2001 following 9/11. She realized that she not only had to tighten her belt if she was going to keep her company afloat, but she also had to incorporate more innovations into her ▶



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business. Within a very short time, Heckes was not merely floating, she was exceeding her business plan.

"I listened to my clients," Heckes explained. "I heard many of them say they wished they had a place to store their exhibits, so I began including storage as part of my service." Now, in addition to storing exhibits, Exhibit-It also services and ships client displays. If a banner or tradeshow booth gets a tear or a wrinkle en route to or from a marketing event, Exhibit-It makes the necessary repairs before shipping the display to its next event.

To give her clients a competitive edge, Heckes says she educates them on marketing opportunities. For a nominal fee, Exhibit-It staff will research trade shows or other events in which a client can participate. Additionally, Exhibit-It will provide information on setting up. Anyone who has shipped materials to or set up a booth at a trade show knows how quickly drayage fees and other hidden costs can mount. One example: if the trade show takes place in a location operated by unions, exhibitors may discover that certain activities must be performed by union members, not by their own employees – regardless of how simple the task may seem. Exhibit-It helps



(L) DJ Heckes photo by Steve Bromberg - stevebrombergphotography.com

troubleshoot all of this in advance, saving its clients' time and frustration.

Heckes seems to agree with those who say she has succeeded in business because she adapts easily. Raised in a military family, she says she learned to adjust quickly to new situations. And, while she credits this adaptability with teaching her to think on her feet, Heckes has also earned a reputation for being able to analyze trends and forecast where she sees the market going. If her forecasts do not pan out as anticipated, Heckes says she quickly makes the necessary adjustments to keep her business growing.

With a certain amount of cheerful braggadocio, Heckes is not afraid to call herself a skilled marketer. And, with 69 percent growth in business during 2006, a staff of 10 and plans to expand into other regions, it is clear that Heckes knows more than just a little about marketing. What's more, it is the impression Heckes and her staff have made on Exhibit-Its' clients that has established Heckes' leadership role in the industry. As Kat Pate with GE Fanuc Embedded Systems attests, "DJ exemplifies the best business practices in management of her successful company. She is an excellent example of an individual who is collectively a superior supplier for her clients, generous with her time and community service, motivational with her active participation in her industry and supporting and mentoring others to be successful." 