

Executive Suite: Karen Perry-Weinstat

By CHRISTINE GIORDANO. Newsday

A Madison Avenue-trained marketer who also holds a master's degree in social work, Karen Perry-Weinstat, of Woodbury, saw an opportunity to use high-tech marketing to help nonprofits fundraise more effectively. Her idea was to transform printed event journals, often discarded after fundraising events, into dynamic electronic journals that can be displayed on big screens during events and later updated with information, advertising and post-gala photos.

Perry-Weinstat launched Event Journal Inc. in Bethpage in 2002 as a single mother with a full-time job. Nonprofits were her market, and when they suffered during the recession, she networked her way to new business.

In 2012, Perry-Weinstat, 53, was rushed to emergency surgery at New York Presbyterian to remove a large, life-threatening brain tumor. "Luckily it didn't affect my thought process or my speech," she says. Her business still showed a bump in revenue in 2012.

Aren't the people who attend fundraising events usually older than the "Internet generation?" How does the e-journal work for them?

I started this concept 11 years ago, and that was really true, but the world has changed and even people now in their 70s or 80s use the Internet . . . They see the journal on the video screens at the event repetitively throughout the night in a much more engaging format. And we offer our clients ancillary, compatible pieces like program books or post-event printed pieces that they can distribute. So it's not an all or none.

What are some ways you draw people to the event journal websites?

Typically, we'll put up some pictures from the prior year just to set the stage, and then after the event we'll put up about 50 pictures and videos. The website will be up for a year. Guests can go back to the website afterward and print a keepsake photo that has been captioned with the names of the organization and the event. So it's like a souvenir that they can print out and keep. It's an engagement tool for donors. It keeps people involved.

During the recession, many nonprofits pulled back on events. How did you survive that?

There are fewer events now, and they're shifting toward different types of events; so there are less sit-down formal galas. [But] even with a smaller pool of clients, the number of nonprofits holding fundraising events is huge.

You started on a shoestring?

I started on a piece of thread. My grandmother left me a very small amount of money, in the low thousands, and I used it to pay the first Web designers to build the first part of the proprietary software that drives Event Journal. And then, since that time I put in small amounts of money, but I'd say at least 90 or 95 percent of the company has been funded by revenues.

What was it like running a business while recovering from a brain tumor?

Recovery is a gradual process. It was probably a full year till I really got my energy and was functioning at full tilt . . . I just had the most incredible support from people in my life, including my staff, who kept everything running.

How did you know it was time to quit your day job?

I was a workaholic and I worked night and day, and I was emailing all hours of the day. I knew it was time to quit my day job when I felt that I was reaching the point where I had to compromise my productiveness. I was a top achiever but I resigned at a point when I could leave in good standing. Event Journal had shown that it was viable and I knew the only thing holding me back was that I wasn't in it a hundred percent.