



A woman on the frontline of technology

Sarmashni has somehow managed to stay a step ahead of the crowd in the competitive arena of ICT. Having been a finalist in the 2004 ICT Business Women Awards and once again being selected as a finalist this year (watch the end year news to see if Sarmashni takes the honours!). This selection is not only as a select member of only three finalists, but covers the entire African continent - quite the accomplishment!

Sage Computer Technologies is involved in a myriad of IT activities, with

services ranging from supply delivery installation, infrastructure management and the placing of ICT consultants to software development and the like. With technologies supplied by SAP, Oracle, Microsoft, Cisco, 3Com and HP (amongst others), Sage leads the field in providing comprehensive solutions. At the forefront of this and hardware supply, in the trenches, is Sarmashni Naidu.

Sarmashni started her career in the late '80's - believing that Varsity was never as good as a hands-on approach.

The ICT sector has always been a predominantly male dominated industry. In this difficult environment a few women are crafting successful careers and climbing to the top of the pyramid. One of those is Sarmashni Naidu, the founder and director of Sage Computer Technologies. The Businesswoman Magazine sent Lance G. Whatmore to have a chat with Sarmashni.

"It's was all so accidental. On the day I was supposed to start a secretarial course, I was offered a marketing position in ICT. I knew nothing about ICT - I just decided it was an interesting challenge!" says Sarmashni. In 1998 she decided that the making of money for others was not the path she preferred and consequently launched her own company. Sage was born. With an understanding husband, a spectacular team of supportive colleagues and an unmatched drive, Sage fought its way into the upper ranks of the ICT sector.

Sarmashni has been happily married for 10 years and has a beautiful three-and-a-half year old daughter, Kaira. "Even that was perfectly planned", she says, "we waited for about 4 years before deciding to have a child!" "To build a business like Sage, you need a team effort - it's just something you can't do on your own", adds Sarmashni. "It's quite funny really - when we started, we'd have a bite to eat for our so-called 'Christmas party' - now, with a staff compliment of 47, it's a different story entirely!" Sage has achieved a 30% year on year growth rate - with a singular focus on the clients' needs. The entire company culture is one of dedication, with directors sharing sandwiches in the boardroom during lunch - no time for extended restaurant lunches!

"My weekends and evenings after about 7pm are my family time", says

Sarmashni, adding "my child is precious and the bond we've formed is something that's very important to me - something I will always make time for."

When asked if this sector is male dominated, Sarmashni's response is direct and to the point ... "NOT IN MY BOARDROOM." The real challenges then? "Cashflow, cashflow, cashflow - it was an absolute nightmare for the first few years - at least the first 6 years" says Sarmashni. "The second biggest challenge is an endless search for the right people," says Sarmashni, adding, "this is something no business can escape or do without - I realised that right in the beginning. Fortunately we have an excellent rate of retention with staff"

"The secret to success in the ICT industry is to keep abreast of technology - technology is like a runaway fire - and has been for the last decade. A company must stay up to date to offer their clients the best solutions in hardware and software. We can't fall behind, not with clients like Hollard, Transnet and the like!" says Sarmashni.

In the midst of this demanding career, does the spirit take a back seat? "No way, I love travelling, going dancing, watching movies (I just adore Morgan Freeman and Mel Gibson) or just enjoying a glass of bitter-sweet white wine at home. I've got a home gym - there's just no time to regularly attend gym!" says Sarmashni.

And advice for those women brave enough to tackle a career in ICT? "Be confident, keep up to date, just know you can do it - because you can!" ■



Sage Computer Technologies (SCT) was established in 1998. A group of individuals who had trained and practiced their trade in the large corporate companies, embarked on their mission to establish an organization that will not only benefit them individually but also provide future opportunities to those unable to exploit their full potential.

The company is fortunate to have been able to assemble a team of appropriately diverse and specialist expertise that is fully representative of the new South Africa. The company is 100% owned and directed by individuals classified as Previous Disadvantaged (PDI) and therefore classify as an Affirmative Business Enterprise in the Public Sector. Sage Computer Technologies is also 50% Black Woman Owned.