

ON THE COVER:

Susan Ratliff –
The EXHIBIT EXPERT
Armed for Business!



by Susan Ratliff

While traveling up the corporate highway, over the mommy track and down the road of entrepreneurship, Susan Ratliff learned a lot about business. Her thirty years in sales and marketing included a stint as a residential real estate agent, a home-based business owner and finally as President of Exhibit Experts. "It has been one wild roller-coaster ride" says Ratliff. Like many small business owners, Susan has faced obstacles and challenges that have tested her mental toughness, emotional strength and financial resources.

She reluctantly closed her first display showroom in 1994 after her manufacturing partner deserted her. She took a sales job with a competing company and ended up buying that business seven months later. She expanded and remodeled her new showroom one month before the September 11 tragedy devastated the tradeshow industry. By implementing some creative marketing and giving special attention to loyal customers, Exhibit Experts survived and thrived. In 2003 the company received the Sterling Award for Micro-business from the Scottsdale Chamber of Commerce.

By 2005 Susan was on track to have the best year in the company's history. It might have happened if two trusted employees had not abruptly departed and opened a competing business down the street. "Everything happens for a reason," says Ratliff, who believes that

challenge resulted in the hiring of her exceptional new staff.

Exhibit Experts is an award-winning tradeshow display company and a top distributor for Featherlite Brand Exhibits. Their new marketing campaign, the Ex Factor, promises Exceptional products, Extraordinary service, Extensive resources and an Excellent reputation. Whether you need displays, banners, counters, graphics or kiosks, Exhibit Experts has what it takes to boost your profits and enhance your image at tradeshow.

In addition to creating dynamic displays, Susan is an author and popular speaker whose seminars help businesses become more productive and profitable at events, improve networking skills and get publicity for their cause. "That's our competitive edge. We don't just sell displays, we teach our customers how to maximize their investment and increase their profits too," says Ratliff.

Susan is proud of what she has accomplished in 12 years as a micro-business owner and strong advocate for others like herself. She has been a member of NAWBO for ten years, serves on the ASBA board of directors and was recently elected to the Board of Trustees of the National Small Business Association in Washington D.C.

"There are many successful women in the Valley who also operate thriving businesses with fewer than 10 employees and they should be recognized and supported for their

contributions to our economy," says Ratliff.

With that goal in mind, Susan created the Women Entrepreneurs' Small Business Boot Camp. The event consists of a full day of education and celebration with speakers, workshops and lots of networking. Susan credits the success of the Boot Camp to the small group of savvy businesswomen who had faith in her vision and unselfishly volunteered their time and talents to help her bring the Boot Camp to fruition. "When I called up my friends in June 2004, and said I wanted to create a conference for 300 women and hold it in January, they didn't tell me I was crazy, they simply asked, "What can we do to help?" This year's planning committee includes long time buddy, Kathy Stephens, founder of the Entrepreneurial Mother's Association; Vickie Mullins, owner of Mullins Creative; Elaine Potter, event manager for Reed Business; Danita Leonard with DL Web Works; Sandy Rogers, the Referral Queen; Wendy Kenney, an agent with Met Life and this year's Mistress of Ceremonies; and her staff Karol Ward, Sue Marshall and Suzy Lyons.

"This event has the most amazing lineup of speakers willing to share their valuable talents," Ratliff explains. "I am so grateful for their participation." Susan is extremely appreciative of those first-year sponsors who took a chance on an unproven concept and jumped on the bandwagon to make the

inaugural Women Entrepreneurs' Small Business Boot Camp a success, and continue their support each year. I could not have pulled off that fantastic first event without the help of *The Business Journal* and The Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce. "After I gained their support, there was no doubt in my mind that I would accomplish my goal."

Three years later, sponsors are calling her. Chase Bank became the exclusive sponsor of the "Meet The Speakers Reception." Met Life, Best Buy and ASBA are lending financial support. *East Valley Woman* magazine, *Ebony Cactus*, Image Craft, Paul's Pro Photo, Arizona Office Technologies, Maximize Your Publicity and Arizona Web TV and Mullins Creative are on board to make the 2007 event the best one yet. "I cannot tell you how rewarding it is to have such powerful partners and I hope they will stay on board as I take the Boot Camp to other cities around the country," says Ratliff.

To hire Susan Ratliff as a speaker or to learn more about Exhibit Experts or the Women Entrepreneurs' Small Business Boot Camp, call 602-437-3634 or visit these websites: www.exhibitexpertsaz.com www.womensbusinessbootcamp.com