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**IN DEPTH: WOMEN IN BUSINESS**

**She's the boss**

Almost 40 percent of area tech companies owned by women  
Kate Reynolds  
Contributing Writer

There's a little more companionship for the digital pioneers of 2000. Is the glass ceiling shattered at last? Not quite. In a report issued by VentureOne, a venture capital research firm in San Francisco, a mere 4 percent of companies nationwide receiving venture capital in 1999 had female CEOs.

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The good news, according to the National Foundation for Women Business Owners, is that there were more than 60,500 women-owned firms in the San Jose metropolitan area in 1999, representing 39 percent of all firms in the city.

"I never found myself disadvantaged based upon being a woman," said Patti Hart, president and CEO of Telocity Inc., a residential broadband online services company located in Cupertino.

"But there are a whole number of glass ceilings. People think about glass ceilings as being directly above in their own organization--an impediment to moving up because of something above--but glass ceilings are broader than that. There are glass ceilings in your vendor population and your customer population too.

"Once I sat on a board where the company was uncomfortable having me

there. That wasn't a glass ceiling in my own company, but it was a glass ceiling."

The real issues women face today are twofold, said Krishna Subramanian, CEO and chairwoman of Kovair Software Inc., based in San Jose.

"The first problem is getting access to the right resources, because women have fewer connections in the marketplace," she said. "Secondly, the bar is higher when you are a woman entrepreneur."

Kovair, a company that provides a scalable, secure business-to-business environment to manage complex strategic relationships, plans to go public next year and has just raised \$9 million from New Enterprise Associates and Sutter Hill Ventures.

"VCs look for three things," said Cynthia Ringo from the Santa Clara offices of CopperCom, where she is CEO. "They want to understand if what you are doing has a big market. Then they need to believe that a particular management team can figure things out along the way to address this market. They need to know also if there is something in the company to give a salable competitive advantage." CopperCom, founded in 1997, creates new voice networks over broadband networks. The company has raised \$65 million so far with expectations of closing another \$90 million soon.

Why do there seem to be more women CEOs finally?

"Because women are more likely to understand that computers have to do a better job of communicating with people," said Ann Hardy, president and CEO of Agorics Inc. in Los Altos. "Women focus on how to make something work for people. The men in the marketplace understand the importance of this, and so women now get funding. Once a business has started, men and women are on an equal footing. Any gender discrimination is overwhelmed by marketplace issues."

Agorics Inc. provides security-focused products and services for the business-to-business marketplace.

"However," added Ms. Hardy, "to learn to make interfaces more human in the future, schools need to teach not only technical subjects, but to have a parallel track as well wherein people learn how to make computers easier for people to use. This new industry needs recognition from the academics."

Ms. Subramanian agreed.

"We're entering the age of the customer. At this point companies can't survive based on just technological innovation. They have to provide good customer service and also have good relationships with their customers to differentiate themselves."

What's the impact of the Internet on gender issues?

"The Internet has opened up many possibilities for women to start businesses in areas of interest to them--areas they feel passionately about. If you look at traditional venture-funded businesses, a lot of them didn't appeal to women. For women, the product ends up as being important," said Ms. Ringo.

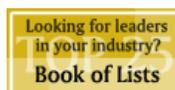
Ms. Hart added, "The Internet has caused an explosion of job opportunities. If people start using ancillary issues as a screen, they will struggle. Technology has been friendly to women because the market has grown explosively. I have a lot of female executive friends who happen also to be very talented. Without the kind of explosion we have on the Internet, I don't know if these people would have had the same opportunities."

"It's a wild ride," said Ms. Ringo. "It feels like you got on a horse that started running really fast. You're holding on with white knuckles and you just hope it's not headed for the barn."

Ms. Reynolds is a freelance writer based in Palo Alto and a minority shareholder in Agorics Inc. Contact her at [kate@waldenpond.com](mailto:kate@waldenpond.com).

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