



A Man With A Vision Succeeds By Design

ANN BOTTICELLI

David Oka struck out on his own in 1991, just as Hawaii's economy was beginning its long downward slide. But as other companies dwindled and downsized, Oka has bucked the trend.

His five-person firm, O Design, has charted astonishing growth. Gross revenues increased nearly 800 percent between fiscal year 1994 and 1996, landing O Design at the top of *Pacific Business News*' list of Hawaii's 50 fastest growing companies and winning Oka notoriety as a shining success in a sea

of failures.

Oka resists standard terms to describe his company. It is not an advertising agency, he says although the company does advertising. Nor is it a graphic design firm, although the company does graphic design.

Instead, Oka offers a term he hopes will catch on: visual marketing.

"We like to work with companies that want us to take care of their whole visual image," Oka says. That means everything from brochures and newsletters to websites and,

eventually, television commercials — all with the same visual theme.

In a business with plenty of competition, Oka believes his company's strength is its personalized attention. Oka and the two graphic designers on his staff work directly with clients such as the Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau and Ilikai Hotels, crafting messages from concept to completion.

In a way, Oka says, opening his company at the start of the state's long downturn was good timing. "People were looking for smaller companies," he recalls.

But the biggest key to his success has been simple hard work.

At the start, Oka worked alone out of a tiny office downtown, cutting costs by sharing equipment with a printing company next door, and wooing clients through cold calls. "I just knocked on a lot of doors, called a lot of people. The main thing was being able to show them our portfolio," he says.

Until last year, Oka logged 90 to 100 hours a week. His wife, Andrea, joined the firm as a sales liaison in 1994, and when their first daughter was born later that year, the couple furnished Andrea's office with baby supplies, so they could keep the child with them during the day. Ten months ago, the



Oka's secret is visual marketing

Oka's daughter was joined in her office play area by a baby brother, and with two children, Oka has managed to cut his weekly work load to 60 hours.

It will be hard to keep up the pace of 800 percent increases, but Oka believes there is still plenty of room to grow, and plenty of clients who will turn to the company for all of their "visual marketing" needs.

"The product is everything," Oka says. "If you have a good product that works for them, it'll bring them back to you."



The O Design staff works together — often overtime — for their clients

Nathalie Ligner-Walker photos