

O DESIGN, INC.

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Company's new vision focuses on customer growth

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O Design Inc., a 6-year-old graphic design company at the Cannery at Iwilei, is this year's winner of Pacific Business News' Fastest 50.

David Oka, president, credited his wife Andrea with the phenomenal growth of O Design.

"When she came on board in 1994, she added a whole new dimension to what we offer," David said. "She made us look at ourselves as more than a graphic design firm and had us focus more on image marketing."

David said he gained a lot of experience, while working at advertising agencies in Honolulu before breaking out on his own. He said he wanted the ability to communicate directly with clients about projects. At an agency, that is difficult to accomplish, he said. Andrea brought to the company her background in marketing and client services. David said it was Andrea's idea to get clients to determine their communication goals and who they want to reach. That is what David believes sets O Design apart from other graphic design firms in Hawaii.

"Once that is figured out, it is a lot easier to make recommendations on what form of visual communications work best and how it will work with the company mix," he said. "Right now the world is in the information age. If it is channeled through the right type of visual medium, only the most understandable and most appealing will be processed. We make the audience want to look at it."

Andrea said it was simply her perspective as a non-graphic designer coming into the company and sharing her own point of view that caused O Design to look at things differently. It was time to market the company as more than a design firm, and to look at ideas from more

than a graphic designer's perspective.

"Because I've worked with clients before I've been given good insight as to what they like," Andrea said. "But Dave is also good. He is a graphic designer, but he also has a great touch with the client. I wouldn't say it is all me. He is the real engine behind our success. He is the one putting in the long hours, working with the clients all day."

David's accountant, Randy Hamasaki of Dean Miyamoto CPA Inc., confirmed O Design's revenues for the fiscal year ending 1994 were \$102,500. From that figure, the company's revenues jumped more than 280 percent the next year to \$390,600. In 1996, O Design's revenues snowballed to \$907,000, a 784.88 percent improvement over its 1994 revenues.

To qualify for consideration in the exclusive Fastest 50 contest, a company must have been profitable in two of the last three years, must post revenues between \$50,000 and \$5 million, and must be an independent, privately held corporation with headquarters in Hawaii. David, who nominated his company, said he had a pretty good feeling about becoming a Fastest 50 finalist.

Kamehameha Schools/Bishop Estate, the Ilikai Hotel Nikko Waikiki, the Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau, HonBlue Inc. and Aloha Airlines Inc. are a few of the clients served by O Design. David was especially pleased to get the HonBlue account because the full-service company works with many advertising and graphics agencies in Honolulu and could choose from any of them.

And according to Keko Paulsen, spokesman for Kamehameha Schools/Bishop Estate, his office does work with several design firms in Honolulu. Paulsen said they became acquainted with O Design through



DAVID OKA



ANDREA OKA

mutual business contacts. He said David makes considerable effort to collaborate with KSBE and shares ideas with them until the two found the right fit.

"We work with a number of very competent designers, but they are very competent and very responsive," Paulsen said. "And that's what makes a difference for us — the service we get and the quality of work. It is always very presentable. First class. We've enjoyed working with them for several years."

At about the time the Ilikai was increasing its rack rate, the hotel also wanted to develop an advertising campaign with a classier feel designed to appeal to a wealthier client. David said people will pay more for what they feel is a good value. For the Ilikai, O Design created a whole new look for its ads, brochures and direct mail programs.

"This goes beyond a logo on a truck," David said. "This is a full image, a whole new look for them."

The staff at O Design has grown only to five, and for good reason. David said it is important to work lean and to work with employees who know what they are doing and who are really nice people. When people work so closely on projects, disruption within the staff can set a company on its ear, he said. To make up for the smaller staff, David said he puts in an 80-hour work week most of the time. Andrea works a saner schedule, he said.

"We know it is not permanent. We know that the way things are here now, we have to do it this way to be

successful," David said. "Hopefully the economy won't always be so bad. But if it weren't for her, I would be thrown into the loony bin."

David's grandfather was a sugar worker who came to the Islands from Japan. His father was one of 13 children and enlisted in the military to see the world. He was the only child to leave Hawaii. David was born in Cincinnati, where his father enrolled in college. Visits to Hawaii for reunions were memorable but David said his was considered the odd family because his rebel father had taken off for the Mainland and married a haole woman.

When David was 26, he decided to try Island life with the help of his extended-family support group. Sunday dinners, which David used to attend weekly, now are a rare occasion. But it was during these family meals that the Island ways were instilled in the Mainland nephew.

O Design gets most of its work by referrals, people and companies already sold on its skills and services. David said it is difficult to turn jobs down and he will work with a company so their timetables line up. Although he would like the company to grow, he said in this economy it is great just to maintain the level of business O Design has achieved so far.

"I don't think many companies experience the kind of growth we have," David said. "There are so many desk top publishers out there. Companies now realize they need quality design. We can help them break through the visual chaos to give them a competitive advantage."