



O Design adds Internet marketing division

FASTEST 50

#21

O DESIGN INC.



PHOTO COURTESY OF O DESIGN INC.

David and Andrea Oka work together to make sure O Design's clients achieve a good marriage between design and marketing.

BY JACOB KAMHIS
PBN Staff Reporter

O Design, Inc. has a new dba called O Comm that owner David Oka anticipates will take off as businesspeople grow more aware of Internet marketing.

O Comm is an abbreviation for

O Communications.

The dba is an organizational change that occurred on Sept. 1 and that parallels the changing image of the 7-year-old design firm.

The four-employee O Design at 629 Kailua Road is moving from traditional graphic design, which

encompasses logos, company identification and brochures to a broader field of visual marketing on Internet Web sites, advertising, direct mail, packaging and publishing.

The company's Internet design work is relatively small right now, ranging from 5 percent to 10 percent of the business. But with the right approach, this percentage could be increased.

O Design was listed in Pacific Business News as a Fastest 50 growing company in July. It was started by Oka in 1991 with \$10,000.

Between 1995 and 1997, company revenues grew 115 percent, from \$390,689 to \$840,796.

But 1998 has shown little growth revenues. That does not mean Oka, who is known to work 100 hours per week, is moving any slower.

He once worked for Ohio-based Huffey Corp. and recalled the marketing and graphics design divisions worked hand-in-hand to produce final products.

Everything Oka did in design was aligned with a marketing strategy; he has instituted this procedure in his own company.

"A lot of times people don't physically meet you, which makes images on a piece of paper and business cards really important," he said. "If they are not in line with the company's marketing plan, the images are not effective."

If a real estate company has the wrong type of logo or uses the wrong type of image, its staff could be perceived as hairdressers or insurance salesmen — nothing to do with real estate, according to Oka.

Aligning the image and the company sometimes require a "complete makeover" to portray professionalism; not just on the Internet, stationary or brochures, but also through use of images on

vans and trucks. The cost of such a makeover starts at about \$10,000.

Oka started his company in a small Bethel Street office. After completing a job for his first client, he asked for referrals and began building references.

1994 proved a milestone. Andrea, his wife, left the hospitality industry and brought her marketing skills to the family business. She boosted demand for Oka's talents and that is when things really took off, which shot O Design in the Fastest 50.

WINNING NUMBERS

Year founded: 1991

Revenue increase: 115.21%

'97 revenue: \$840,796

'95 revenue: \$390,689

Start-up capital: \$10,000

Employees in 1997: 5

Employees in 1995: 4

Top executive, title:
David Oka, president

Clients include Kamehameha Schools/Bishop Estate, Paradise Water, Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau and the Hyatt Regency Waikiki.

Perhaps the most joyous part of the job was not graphics design work but the couple's children, Nicole and Daniel.

He and Andrea kept daughter Nicole in the office and he could take an hour or two from his schedule and spend time with her. That worked well.

But then came son Daniel, a bit of a rascal, who was enthralled with touching computer connections and electrical plugs, and who did not really take to spending time in an office,

according to Oka.

So the company was moved to the office on Kailua Road, a three-minute drive from home. As part of his workday, Oka simply goes home to spend time with the kids.

Buying equipment has been an issue because such improvements must be carefully considered.

From 1995 to 1997, Oka spent \$50,000 on equipment with the anticipation of being busy. This meant there was an even bigger need to find more work, he said.

In one breath, Oka said, there is no magic formula to success. It just takes long hours and the intention to make sure customers feel they are getting the most for their money.

There is no dearth of work for visual marketing companies. The key is offering consistently good products, he added.

Eric Woo, owner of Eric Woo Design, Inc., started his design firm in 1985.

Woo said Oka has earned his success, adding Oka is a hard worker and diligent person. But getting business also depends on the type of clients and their budgets.

For Woo, this year has seen better profits than last year but not as good as five years ago.

He has been doing more for retailers on the mainland and in the United Kingdom. By working for offshore clients, the one-man operation at Grosvenor Center is not affected by the local economy.

Also, a local firm can charge higher prices when servicing mainland companies, more than what the local market is accustomed to paying. The downside is losing work to an offshore design firm that wins the contract to produce images for all the company's offices.

For both Oka and Woo, referrals generate the bulk of their business. And marketing savvy is important in sustaining it.