

Lena Lumeisky

Owner of Woland Technology

How did you get started in this business?

My husband and I moved to Charlotte, North Carolina from London in 2005. We had no roots in the city, no family close by who knew where to find good parks and playgrounds where we could take our two (now three) young daughters, where to look for good pediatricians, summer camps, schools, you name it. Once we settled in, I realized how helpful it would have been if someone had a website where I could find all of this information ahead of time. That's how KidsInCharlotte.com was born. I took all of the information I could think of that might be helpful to parents who are new to Mecklenburg County and put it in one place on the Web.



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It went live in October 2005 and I hope it has been a useful tool for parents like me and my husband, who are moving to the area. It was a dry run for Woland Technology, and looking back I'm pretty

What is your background-what were you doing before this business?

I have a Masters degree in Computer Science from the University of Michigan, but I didn't start out creating websites. Most of the programming I've done before Woland - working at large financial institutions like Goldman Sachs, Deutsche Bank and Merrill Lynch - involved designing customized software systems for their sales, trading and back-office operations: complex database-driven applications written over many months by teams of programmers around the world. It was everything you might expect from working on Wall Street during the tail end of the Dot-Com era: long hours, lots of pressure, and no end of colorful personalities and general craziness. Despite the stress, it was a great experience that taught me a great deal about how to manage projects, motivate my employees, and deliver a product my clients appreciated. Incidentally, when your clients have included Wall Street securities traders, there's not much any other client can do to shock or upset you. It's a very high bar.

The fork in my road came with the birth of our first daughter, Rebecca, right around the collapse of the Dot-Com bubble on Wall Street, and two months to the day before

happy with the way it turned out. Currently, KidsInCharlotte gets 25,000 visitors a month, on average.

9/11. It seemed like a good opportunity to become a full-time mom, and I took it. A year later, we moved to London, where our second daughter, Polly, was born. A few years after that, we moved back to the U.S., where our third daughter, Mia, was born, and I began to write KidsInCharlotte on a whim. Once that project was done, and I realized I could do it flexibly enough to accommodate my children's schedules, I formed Woland Technology and hung out my shingle (or meta-shingle if we're talking about Google). The technical side wasn't very hard after my experience at the New York investment banks. Plus, I quickly realized how much I love working with different kinds of businesses, meeting new people, entrepreneurs from every background, who have so much enthusiasm and such amazing ideas. It's a lot of fun and very gratifying to know, and to be told, you've done a great job.

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What are some interesting statistics about your business?

We've been in business since 1996. We now work with over 70 clients and our business is growing at more than 50% per year based on revenue.

What is unusual or unique about your business, in comparison to your competitors or similar businesses?

Woland Technology doesn't try to be all things to all people. We focus on web design and internet marketing, and we do it really well, in my opinion. We are agile enough to service many different industries - real estate, education, fashion, retail, industrial - but we succeed on our strengths, which are, first, designing responsive, functional and elegant web sites that meet or surpass our clients' expectations, and second, providing the dedicated support that our clients need once their sites go live. We concentrate on building what, for many of our clients, will be the public face of their company - the mental impression that

their potential customers will form in the first 15 seconds after hyper linking in from a Google list of, literally, thousands of search results. If we've done our job properly and the site stands out - holds the customer's attention - everything has to work seamlessly to provide them quickly with the information they are looking for, or, in an e-commerce site, lead to a sale. If it's not working as intended, we collaborate with the client to make sure it does. For some of our clients, what's important is that we're local - their concerns or spontaneous ideas are not funneled through a call center in the Philippines. It reinforces their trust in our ability to support their business in a committed way.

Our other secret weapon is our alliance with Paper Blossom Marketing, a fantastic Charlotte-based company specializing in social media and marketing, run by Kelly Yale and Shannon Hawk. They are experts at enhancing corporate brands and getting companies linked into Facebook and Twitter, all crucial to a strong Web presence. Our collaboration with Paper Blossom has been a huge boon to our clients. It has without question provided both our teams with opportunities we would not have had working separately.

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Finally, a lot of web designers start out in graphic arts and migrate to the technical side. My experience in the IT world meant Woland was established, first and foremost, on a solid technological foundation. To be sure, there is no "right" or "best" way to get started in web design. But having a strong techie background enabled me to do more complex projects such as e-commerce sites, photo galleries, and database-intensive services like Chai Expectations, an online matchmaking site. One project involved creating from scratch a web-based payroll application for a local company with nearly 900 employees. Building a software application like that is not really web design - but you'd be surprised at how much they have in common.

So, what's unusual or unique about Woland? It's a young company helping other young companies build their business and seize the remarkable opportunities that the Web offers. We build websites for entrepreneurs. We know the challenges they face and understand a basic fact: what they often need is not so much a service provider but a partner.

What are some of the greatest challenges in your business?

I think web design is one industry that has not become commoditized yet. Maybe it's gradually approaching commoditization, but it's not there yet.

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Still, many companies select a web design firm with the commodity paradigm in mind. A startup company on a budget may balk at an estimate because their friend offered to write them a site "just as good" for a quarter of the price - in their spare time. An established company with a seven figure turnover may need to rationalize their large marketing budget by massively overpaying for their website, when they could have gotten a better, more professional result from a smaller, more engaged and nimble shop. Granted, it's hard to tell if a company is

worth its salt without doing research, talking to the owner, looking at the portfolio, understanding what the service contract says - it's all time-intensive work. How much easier to fall back on the common assumptions that all web design companies are basically the same, and you get what you pay for. Common, but wrong.

So, one of the greatest challenges for me is exploring the commodity myth through marketing, making personal connections with potential clients as well as with teammates, like Kelly and Shannon at

Paper Blossom. And, of course, through hard work and creative approaches to each client's needs.

Another challenge is keeping up with a rapidly evolving industry. The Web didn't really exist, functionally, until the mid-90s. That's only fifteen years ago. The most cutting-edge technologies and tools available to do what we do at Woland may be obsolete in five years. If we don't keep pace, so will we. It's exciting, but it requires a strong technical background and a constant willingness to learn from everyone on the Woland team. In

addition, running this company requires enough discipline and pragmatism to realize that a client may not want or need the latest untested whiz-bang feature on their website. But what they will need almost certainly is a site that looks great on multiple platforms, like a home PC and a tablet computer (e.g., an iPad).

What would you like our readers to know about your journey in business?

The aphorism about the fox and the hedgehog is, "the fox knows many little things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." As much as I love the technical aspects of my business, the "hedgehog" side of it, I accomplish more by being a bit of a fox: sharpening my networking skills, finding a common language with my clients and employees. Learning to recognize what I'm good at, and focusing on that without losing sight of the interpersonal relationships that really drive my business.

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