

## BUSINESSWOMAN OF THE YEAR FINALIST - FOR-PROFIT

# Agency founder finds perfect recipe for successful business

*Lynette Lo Tom has a track record of succeeding in both the best and worst of times. In the past 20 years, she has built her firm from a one-person consultancy to one of Hawaii largest and most successful full-service communications and public relations agencies.*

*Much of Lo Tom's work is behind the scenes. Over the years, she has assisted more than 60 local nonprofit organizations with marketing and communications, offering either pro bono help or discounted rates. Her willingness to help others is based on her belief that Hawaii businesses will prosper only if they are given the opportunity to reach their full potential.*

*As a member of the Honolulu Japanese Chamber of Commerce, Lo Tom was instrumental in launching "Chopsticks and Wine," its annual fundraising event, in 2002. It has grown from an initial turnout of 500 people to more than 1,200 last year.*

*Lo Tom also is a gourmet cook and donates dinners to charity auctions.*

**How my business has begun to recover from the economic downturn:** We received MORE calls for work, but unfortunately it may be because many companies have reduced staffing and they are enlisting our help for their public relations and marketing needs. When we help clients



**Lynette Lo Tom**  
Founder, President  
and CEO  
Bright Light Marketing

grow their businesses through our services, they appreciate the value of marketing.

**The most important lesson I learned from the economic downturn:** It is always a good reminder that clients can spend their money anywhere. If we provide good service and good value, they will continue to work with us in hard times and in prosperous times.

**The single most pressing concern for my business:** Traditional media are changing and fewer people are reading print, so we need to constantly innovate and "morph" our business to adapt to how people engage with media today. Marketing methods are constantly changing.

**The biggest challenge facing the state of Hawaii, and what I would do about it:** We need more economic development so there will be more jobs for our children and our friends in Hawaii. I try to encourage others to appreciate entrepreneurs and especially developers as they take many risks and are not always appreciated.

**How social media has changed the way I run my business:** People want information faster and in many more varied ways, so we distribute information through social media in addition to traditional channels to efficiently get the word out about our clients.

**The business leader I admire most:** My husband, Neal Kanda, CFO at Finance Factors and former Central Pacific Bank president, is a natural leader and encourages me to remember that because I have been in the business for 30 years, I should be more patient with newcomers, and always show them respect. I am not a natural manager; I like the work and am more of a "doer."

**Advice for this year's high school graduates:** Don't be afraid to discover your passions. It may mean changing jobs often or volunteering in a new industry. Once you find out what you enjoy, work becomes very fun, exciting and natural.

**How I try to give back to the causes I support:** We are fortunate to have been profitable over the years, which enables us to donate time and/or funds to our nonprofit clients. There are so many critical needs for assistance and we are happy to provide marketing services when we are able to for these great community causes.

**What I do to unwind:** I am happiest when I'm traveling or cooking. I collect cookbooks and enjoy trying new dishes and making food for people. This ranges from elaborate dinners for charities to cooking for 70 crew members in the Society of Professional Journalists' Gridiron Show.

**My biggest extravagance:** Preparing dinners for charities and for family and friends is an indulgence and a personal passion.

**One thing that most people don't know about me:** My first job, at 15, was at Zippy's McCully as counter help, wearing a hairnet and those orange-and-white uniforms.