

Inspirational Entrepreneurs

Elizabeth Tarpley: Bridging Divides



Elizabeth Tarpley is making a career out of applying her technology skills and business smarts to bridging one digital divide after another. First it was in providing technology assistance to low-income individuals and seniors. Now the single mother and entrepreneur is focusing on the younger set.

In 2002, Tarpley founded Integrated Solutions Inc., providing custom technology assistance for special-needs users such as senior citizens and the physically disabled. She created her latest venture, Targeted Technology Solutions, LLC (TTS), in 2006, developing computer peripherals and online properties

to encourage creative computer use among kids ranging in age from two to ten. Based in Homewood, IL, TTS' first product is MyPC, a stage-based brand of washable, spill-proof keyboards with colorful styling designed to enhance children's cognitive abilities.

"My daughter showed a great interest in technology, and there just weren't any tools available that weren't toys," says Tarpley, who formerly was the director of technology at SCORE! Educational Centers. "Children see their parents using computers and they want to use them too. I wanted my daughter and other children to have that experience."

Developing MyPC was challenging. "I had been in technology for

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years, but now we were actually talking about manufacturing. We had to not only get to know the trade and source manufacturers, but also deal with the added diligence to ensure that our products are safe for children and the environment,” Tarpley says.

“When we launched at Toy Fair 2008, we went in there very quietly, it being our first major trade show, and we walked out being named the most notable keyboard for children. And there we were up against some of the biggest, most established brands in our nation! That was a great moment.”

MyPC now benefits from a growing distribution network that includes catalogs, online distributors, the company’s own Web site and even some big-box retailers. New products — both hardware and content — are coming in the next



18 months, and they will focus on special needs, continuing with products for children, senior citizens and other accessibility niches.

“Seeing the MyPC keyboard being sold at places where I actually shop for my daughter was one of the biggest ‘wow’ moments — seeing my vision travel from an idea to reality,” Tarpley says. She adds that it’s also gratifying to be able to do what she’s passionate about, which is to enhance people’s interactions with technology.

“The part of me that will go out and donate keyboards to needy schools, give training to teachers or provide assistance to low-income families who are just entering the tech world is something I do from the heart,” she says.

And how has this experience changed her? “I’m a much stronger woman than I was three years ago,” she states. “This journey has been a roller coaster, and there are days that will challenge you. You really have to say to yourself ‘don’t give up,’ and you have to stay firm on your dream and your goals. These have probably been the hardest three years of my life, but also the best years. I continue to get stronger and stronger.” ■

To view a video interview with Elizabeth Tarpley and to read stories from other inspirational entrepreneurs, visit www.forbes.com/inspire.