

Company plots future from fixture of the past

Launch International has moved into a building with a long history. High-tech firms come here for marketing expertise.

By DAN REIMOLD
Staff Writer

An area business has breathed new life into a historic landmark.

Launch International, a strategic marketing company based in Doylestown, has relocated to the former D.P. Smith Saddle and Harness Making Shop at 95 W. Court St.

More than 100 years ago, Smith's was an area fixture, outfitting horses and riders with gear and housing a carriage shop on its second floor. More recently, the three-story brick building served as separate apartments.

Jody Canavan, Launch International president and chief executive officer, was first attracted to the structure as a possible business site in June 2000, due to its size, unique architectural design and historic significance.

After 11 months of renovations, the company moved into

the space from its old digs on West Clinton Street in the middle of June.

Now, the site that once sold horse-riding equipment is home to T-1 lines and a Mac computer network.

"It's a funky juxtaposition," said Marianne Koehler, managing director. "It's an old building with incredibly high-end technology inside."

From its newest location, Launch will continue its business of marketing products and services of high-technology businesses.

Koehler said the company's client list is mainly composed of hardware manufacturers, software developers, distributors and service providers, including Avnet, Lucent, SunGuard, Unisys, IBM, Gateway, Enterasys, United Messaging and Microsoft.

"We spend a lot of time on the strategy up front, making sure that it makes solid business sense before the work is actually produced," Canavan said. "A lot of companies can make a nice brochure, but not very many can make a nice brochure that is strategically sound."

Beyond brochures, Canavan said, the company uses sales kits, newsletters, magazines, industry guides, and multimedia and Web presentations to exhibit, and sell, products to potential buyers.

The company has also been recognized for its clinics held to

determine the marketing appeal of a company's products.

Canavan said Launch conducts 50 to 100 of these workshops each year for industry giant Compaq.

"Compaq hires us to fly all over the world to meet with their software partners to redefining software and hardware as a combined solution," Canavan said.

Canavan previously worked in Horsham at Decision Data Inc., an IBM peripherals manufacturer and distributor. As the company's director of marketing, Canavan said she found that most advertising agencies and public relations firms were unable to fully understand, and in turn effectively market, high-technology products.

Canavan started Launch from her Doylestown home in 1992 to break that technology gap, after contemplating job offers from tech companies in Boston and California.

"It was one of those now-or-never decisions to start the company," Canavan said. "I went to three companies, offered to consult for them, to help them build tools effectively and bring their technology to market."

After beginning fully booked, Canavan said, the company has grown quietly, almost entirely through word-of-mouth referral.

Launch employs 17 people full time and has seen nearly 2000 percent revenue growth over the past five years, with



Staff photo by Laurence Kelly

Judy Canavan, president, stands at the new Doylestown location of Launch International.

The strategic marketing firm has moved into a building that at one time housed a saddle and harness business.

earnings of \$6 million projected for 2001.

Canavan remains convinced the unique atmosphere of downtown Doylestown is a key component in Launch's success, as

well as workers' satisfaction.

"We decided it was important to build a company in an environment where the employees could feel part of the community and stroll through town at

lunchtime," said Canavan. "We wanted it to be more charming, creative and interesting to work at than a traditional office park setting."