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On its way: Jody Canavan, Doylestown-based Launch International's founder and president.

Launch propels products

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DOYLESTOWN — Launch International's business has three parts. Part advertising agency, part consultant and part educator, the company may be hard to sum up easily, but that hasn't stopped it from making a lot of money.

Launch helps technology companies bring new products to market, a strong enough niche for it to have increased its revenues by 443 percent in two years.

The company went from \$700,000 in revenue in 1998, to a little over \$1 million in 1999. By 2000, it had hit \$3.8 million and is projecting around \$6 million this year.

Its client roster includes quite a few tech industry heavies: Microsoft, Unisys, SunGard Data Systems, Avnet, Compaq and IBM.

"We take apart the technology from an engineering perspective and build it back up through marketing," Jody Canavan, founder and president of Launch, said in explaining

what her company does.

"Many companies build great technology but really struggle to create solutions that are understandable by salespeople who have to sell and the customers who have to use," she said.

To help demystify technology, Launch might write a white paper for a client, produce a newsletter, or even a magazine, as it did for Unisys.

The biggest part of its business is helping salespeople: "We go into tech companies and

Launch: Marketing assistance

help them build (sales) solutions through a workshop process," Canavan said.

Called "messaging" workshops, Launch uses them to develop a complete sales plan.

"After the workshop you can say here is the value, and here is the process we will follow to get to find the quickest path to revenue for sales people," Canavan said. "From that then comes the traditional things one usually sees: Brochures, data sheets, all kinds of collateral, all targeted with messages we developed during the workshop."

Launch also develops "soup to nuts" sales kits that the company can take either to its own direct sales organization or a reseller organization.

"We always say that we learn a company's technologies just a little better than its salespeople learn them," Canavan said.

Pat McAnally, director of marketing at SunGard Planning Solutions, a division of SunGard Data Systems of Wayne, said she's been using Launch's services for about five years.

McAnally said over the years, she has used the service more and more, to supplement her small marketing department and "expand and contract my staff according to projects I'm working on."

Such long-term relationships have enabled Launch to grow.

The business began in Canavan's home

in 1992, and recently relocated to the renovated 100-year-old Bucks County Saddlery in the middle of Doylestown.

The company employs 17. Five are design professionals, a few are administrative personnel and one takes care of information technology.

The remainder are program managers, who, like Canavan, create content and work with customers. Two senior employees, Marianne B. Koehler and Eric Nitschke, act as managing directors.

Most of Launch's employees have ample technological experience. Canavan got into the field right out of college.

A native of Massachusetts, she started her career with Raytheon in 1981, and has worked for Telex and IBM.

"I always had jobs that were customer-facing or sales-facing. I moved into managing product from a marketing perspective," Canavan said.

About 14 years ago Canavan took a job as a product business manager with Decision Data in Horsham (which has since changed its name to DecisionOne).

"The platform that I managed was worth about 3 percent of company revenue when I came and about 50 percent when I left. Storage, information management, disaster recovery — those were all really high growth areas," Canavan said.

THE SHORT OF IT

Company: Launch International

Location: Doylestown

Owner: Jody Canavan

Type of Company: Assists technology companies with sales and marketing.

Permanent employees: 17

Projected 2001 sales: \$6 million

2000 revenue: \$3.8 million

1999 revenue: \$1 million

1998 revenue: \$700,000 •

After five years Canavan felt she needed a change, but all her job offers came from California or Boston.

"My husband and I actually fell in love with the Bucks County area. We had two small children here. We felt established and didn't want to move," she said.

So she started Launch, and when she outgrew her home office, moved to Doylestown. The next step for Launch is the opening of offices on the West Coast and in Boston.

"We feel it takes one year to learn the methodology," she said. "We would love to do it this year or next year." •

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