

## **The Women of Tech**

In Corporate America, the number of tech outfits run by women is small. But their influence is growing, as are their achievements

Quick -- name the most prominent women CEOs in the country. There's Carly Fiorina of Hewlett-Packard (HPQ), Meg Whitman of eBay (EBAY ), Anne Mulcahy of Xerox (XRX ), Patricia Russo of Lucent (LU ). What do they have in common? All head high-tech corporations.

Women lead only seven of the companies in the S&P 500-stock index -- that's just 1.4% -- and most of those are tech outfits. Move beyond the top slot, moreover, and you'll find other prominent women in tech. Susan Decker is CFO of Internet giant Yahoo! AT&T President Betsy Bernard heads Ma Bell's Business division, which recorded \$27 billion in revenue last year. Chief Financial Officer Doreen Toben holds the purse strings at No. 1 phone company Verizon, whose 2002 sales totaled \$67.5 billion.

**CULTURAL IMPERATIVE.** Size isn't the only thing that matters, of course. Judy Estrin, chairman of Packet Design, is a serial technology entrepreneur who has served as chief technology officer for Cisco Systems (CSCO) and sits on the boards of Walt Disney (DIS), Federal Express (FDX), and Sun Microsystems (SUNW). Up-and-comers include Sandra Morris, who is co-CIO at semiconductor giant Intel (INTC), and Mary Ann Davidson, Oracle's (ORCL) chief security officer, is the woman who in charge of ensuring that the company delivers on its promise to make its databases "unbreakable." High tech has come a long way, baby.

Well, it has -- even though it's still overwhelmingly a male domain, even more than Corporate America overall. And it's Silicon Valley's own meritocratic culture that has helped these women and others break through what previously seemed to be an impenetrable glass ceiling.

"In newer industries, like technology, it's strictly qualifications that get you where you want to go," says David Parker, founder and CEO of executive search firm DP Parker & Associates in Wellesley, Mass. "That's why you're more likely to see women and minorities in senior positions [in tech] than in old-line, entrenched industries such as insurance, banks, steel, or manufacturing."

**"SYSTEMATIC APPROACH."** Perhaps counterintuitively, high-tech companies' short development cycles and cutthroat cultures also have helped women succeed. In a pressure-cooker environment, executives are judged on whether they meet sales and marketing goals, or on whether a project is finished on time, not on who their golf buddies are.

"Companies like HP and Xerox developed clearly defined performance-management systems a long time ago," says Marcia Brumit Kropf, vice-president for research and information services at Catalyst, a nonprofit organization that pushes for the advancement of women in business. "Having that kind of systemic approach is a benefit to women."

The experiences of the women BusinessWeek Online profiles in this Special Report bear this out. Only 20 years ago, many say, they confronted skepticism and consternation from colleagues and customers who were surprised to find them in sales or technology. "You'd walk into meetings with a big customer in Europe and Asia, and people would have a hard time at first [wondering] 'Should I take this person as seriously as I would a high-level executive?'," recalls Packet Design's Estrin. But she and others say they overcame such barriers by being knowledgeable, prepared -- and by consistently delivering. Says Lucent CEO Russo: "Results matter -- it's hard to argue with them."

**MANDATORY CHANGES.** True, but government intervention also played a role in helping some of these women advance to such lofty levels. Four on our list -- Bernard, Toben, Fiorina, and Russo -

- spent a key part of their early careers at AT&T. At one time, Ma Bell was such a bastion of male culture that, in 1970, some 7% of all discrimination complaints to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission were lodged over its treatment of women. AT&T ultimately signed a \$38 million consent decree that aimed to remedy what the government called its "blatantly unlawful" discrimination against women. "One of the things that gave me a huge advantage was the fact that I was in a special [management] program," says AT&T's Bernard. "Those kind of programs are great for anyone -- men or women. But I think the reason there were women in the numbers that there were at that time is because of the consent decree."

Bernard wasn't the only one to benefit. Carly Fiorina (See BW Online Special Report, "Where Will Carly Fiorina Take HP?"), Patricia Russo (See BW Online Special Report, "Lucent's Best Hope?"), Doreen Toben (See BW Online Special Report, "Minding Verizon's Bottom Line"), and dozens of talented, though less prominent executives like Patricia Higgins, CEO at collocation service provider Switch & Data, and Sue Swenson, CEO at Leap Wireless, all came out of AT&T.

Breaking through the ceiling hasn't been easy for women everywhere in tech. According to Catalyst, just 11% of corporate officers at America's 500 top technology companies are women, vs. 15.7% at the largest 500 companies overall. And women lag behind in the competition for seats on corporate boards, holding 9.3% at tech companies, vs. 12%-plus for the 500 largest corporations. From 1996 to 2002, the Information Technology Assn. reports, the percentage of women among IT professionals barely increased, inching from 25% to 25.3%.

That probably won't change soon. Women now earn about 57% of all undergraduate degrees (see BW Cover Story, 5/26/03, "The New Gender Gap"), but they get only 22% of the diplomas in computer science and engineering. And while half of law and medical school students are female, women make up just 30% of the student body at U.S. business schools -- a percentage that hasn't risen in years.

OPEN MORE DOORS? Moreover, today's teenage girls are shunning business as a possible career, according to an October, 2002, study by the Simmons College School of Management. Fewer than 10% of girls anticipate a career in business, in part because they don't understand what that will entail and lack confidence in their abilities, according to the survey of nearly 5,000 middle school students. Just 17% of girls say they have a good understanding of a business career, vs. 33% of boys.

Privately, many women in tech believe that the Carly Fiorinas, Betsy Bernards, and Meg Whitmans of the world should take a more active role in opening doors for the female rank and file -- and in opening the minds of girls who could be the next generation of women business leaders. But that idea is anathema to most women executives, who want to be judged on performance alone. HP's Fiorina has said time and again that she believes her sex is irrelevant: "I have to do the job I've been asked to do to the best of my ability," she told CNBC on Apr. 28.

Experts agree. "At the end of the day, it's about individuals," says David Nosal, head of Korn Ferry's global CEO practice in Silicon Valley. "It's about who has the ability and track record to build value." In technology, the women on our list have proven that they're up to the job.

**Disponível em: <<http://www.businessweek.com>>. Acesso em: 10 jun. 2003.**