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BRIGHT FUTURE: Dorcie Farkash, CEO of TW Design, is going after new clients and positioning her company to seize new business once the economy rebounds.

IDEAS IN ACTION

Bold moves

THE TOUGH ECONOMY HASN'T STOPPED **T W DESIGN** FROM ADDING TALENT AND REVAMPING ITS MARKETING STRATEGIES

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BIGGEST PROBLEM

TW Design, like many small businesses, began experiencing a drop in demand as the economy slowed. But instead of pulling back, CEO Dorcie Farkash is moving full-speed ahead, hiring staff, going after new markets and taking its interactive 3-D displays to clients around the globe. "The world is our oyster," she says.

It may be instinctual for small businesses to hunker down in slower economic times, but one Dallas-based design and consulting firm calls that notion "flawed reasoning." Instead of cutting back, Dorcie Farkash,

president and chief executive of TW Design, is adding talent and beefing up marketing efforts so her company will be ready when the economy turns around.

"This downturn will not last forever," she said. "When the economy bounces back,

BOLD: *Ready to grow*

we'll be ready for it with a fresh look, a well-assembled team and a head start on the competition."

T W Design designs and builds themed and interactive marketing displays for tradeshow exhibits, theme park attractions, corporate showrooms, museums and even model trains.

The company generated \$2.8 million in revenue in 2007. This year, it's expecting to rake in \$3.2 million.

The decision for a new marketing direction was spurred last fall when key clients began reducing their budgets. Farkash was ready to strengthen her company's sales and marketing efforts and found a healthy mix of available talent.

One of her first "champion" hires was Aaron Fox, director of strategic marketing, who tackled redesigning the company's Web site, a lingering sore spot.

"We'd been in the process of updating our Web site since 2005," Farkash said. "We burned through \$10,000 or \$12,000 on people who said they could do it but never did."

Next came a brand overhaul and new advertising campaign. During that time, she began tapping into deeply discounted vendor rates to stretch her business dollars. Farkash was shocked to find that discounts of more than 50% were available when she shopped around.

"It's so competitive out there," she said. "You have to spend money smart and do some comparison shopping out there."

T W Design is used to adapting to changes in the marketplace.

Designer Roger Farkash founded T W Design (which stands for "theatrical warehouse") in 1982 to serve the theatrical industry. But the savings and loan crisis hit the Dallas arts community hard and "theaters started dropping like flies," Dorcie said.

Roger's passion for theater and design didn't wane, and in 1985 he invited his wife Dorcie to join him in the business. Roger also worked a second backstage job and Dorcie, with two small children under the age of 4, remembers thinking she might see more of him if she came on board.

Creative people aren't known for their penchant for running businesses, however. When Dorcie took over, the company lacked computers and a phone system. Her own background, a fine arts degree in dance from Southern Methodist University, wasn't much help either.

"Ignorance is bliss," she said. "If I had known what I was getting into ... But for us it is about the dream and never losing sight of the dream. Our dream was to be together and raise a family."

A diverse client base and Dorcie's focus on growing the business has helped the company remain agile and profitable. In 2007, T W Design earned \$2.8 million, and projections for this year top \$3.2 million.

World events such as the recent lead scandal hitting the toy industry have all impacted the company's business, but Dorcie tries to focus on the bigger picture.

"We have lost so many clients and it's such a psychological game," she said. "But I don't focus on that. It's a huge country we live in. We are an international company and the world is our oyster."

The company's client roster includes food-related gigs with The Richards Group, designing 3-D Chick-fil-A boards, and an avocado display for Combs Produce. It recently signed deals to design a bird set for the State Fair of Texas and another with Wilson Interior Designers for presenter boxes in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

T W Design also is creating a new company division called TrainWorx to focus on trains, another passion of Roger's.

Dallas-based Broadlane Inc. has been a T W Design client since 2001. The supply chain company's tradeshow booth is designed to be rethemed, meaning it can transition from a small basketball court one year to a miniature golf course the next.

"The things they've done for us have always been cutting edge and unbelievably well-received," said Jim Webb, senior vice president of marketing at Broadlane.

Dorcie hopes that T W Design's increased sales and marketing efforts will propel the company into uncharted territory.

"We've been a very well-kept secret in D-FW and we're trying to explode out of that and be bold in this time when people are so afraid," she said. "We're having a lot of fun and each day is a challenge."

NIelsen is a Plano-based writer.