



Candy Marshall

COMPANY: Suite Solutions

WHERE IT'S AT: Los Alamitos

WHAT IT DOES: Helps bankruptcy attorneys easily access consumer information from all three credit bureaus

STARTING CAPITAL: \$300,000

QUOTE: "Follow your heart and always do what's right."

Candy Marshall was sure her idea would pay off big.

But two years after she had invested \$300,000 of her own money in a company to make consumer credit reports easily accessible to bankruptcy attorneys, she still hadn't drawn a paycheck. Even her husband suggested she throw in the towel.

Still, the entrepreneur was convinced she had identified a lucrative niche market. She stuck with her business plan, developed strategic partnerships with the makers of bankruptcy software, tapped an advisory board and marketed her idea at trade shows.

Marshall's gutsy persistence paid off. Her Los Alamitos-based company, Suite Solutions, is the only firm of its kind to offer attorneys access to credit reports from all three major agencies.

"And my husband says he's so glad I didn't listen to him," Marshall says with a chuckle. "I knew it wasn't going to be easy, but I also knew this was something that had to be done."

Not many entrepreneurs, male or female, can boast of such success. Just 3 percent of businesses owned by women and 6 percent of those owned by men reach the million-dollar sales mark, according to the Center for Women's Business Research, a nonprofit group based in Virginia.

But those elite entrepreneurs, like Marshall, are a force to be reckoned with. They are responsible for 67 percent of the revenue and 59 percent of all employment by women-owned firms, according to the agency. In

California, women-owned businesses employ more than 1.9 million people and generate \$318 billion in revenues.

"In the 1970s, women owned less than 10 percent of all businesses. Within a generation, we've seen that number grow four-fold," says Gwen Martin, interim director of the center. "With women-owned businesses growing at twice the rate of all U.S. firms, it's clear that women may hold part of our economic solution."