

Field of Dreams

This entrepreneur is making a difference for women in tech--and her SMB clients

By April Y. Pennington

Lena L. West was initially discouraged by the lack of black women in the tech field when she started [XynoMedia Technology](#), a Yonkers, New York-based tech consulting firm for SMBs, in 1997. "At the time, there wasn't much of a presence of people of color in general," says West. Then West began noticing that people remembered her specifically because she was one of the few black females in the field, and she says she started to revel in her unique status. However, she hopes more will join the ranks and acknowledges the pioneers that came before her: "I stand on the shoulders of a lot of women working in the tech space."

Yet West, in her early 30s, says it's also a challenge "being asked what it's like being a person of color in technology." Through sharing her experiences and increasing awareness, West wants to be noted less for her race and more for her achievements--from 2005 to 2006, XynoMedia has increased revenue by 46 percent, projecting 2006 sales to reach \$1 million to \$2 million. West was raised with strong women in her family who "always thought in terms of possibility," she says.

West says she also realized business guidance didn't have to come from someone who "looked like her"--she has had mentors of many races. She has yet to find a one-on-one black woman mentor and notes that there's no national face for a black female in technology. "If you can't follow the greatest, you have to be the greatest yourself," says West, hoping to take the helm.

"Technology was supposed to be this great equalizer--it was supposed to give opportunities to everyone, but it didn't," she laments. She's writing a book exploring why women themselves are partly responsible for the fact that women are not huge players in the tech space. It may raise ire in some, but West says, "I'm a huge believer in personal responsibility. I believe whatever situation you find yourself in--positive or challenging--you have, in some way, contributed to being there."

Meanwhile, West is contributing to the tech education of SMBs. After providing tech consulting to big corporations in her previous career, West believes smaller businesses should have equal access to knowledge. XynoMedia's mission is to arm 1,000 SMBs with technology strategies by 2010. Her company's eight-week teleconsulting courses, which are on rolling enrollment, offer the same kind of consultation given to major corporations. Says West, "You can grow your business with great people and products, but if you're not using technology to implement those strategies, you're not realizing the full potential of your business."

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