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Profile of Christine Ehrenbard

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Christine Ehrenbard
Director, Broadcast Distribution
CBS, Inc.

Ms. Ehrenbard currently works for CBS, Inc. where she manages the extensive satellite, fiber and telephony network facilities and management control systems required to handle CBS program gathering and distribution. International and domestic distribution services are provided to CBS News, Sports, Entertainment and Syndication clients.

She is also responsible for all day-to-day operations in addition to business development and new technology planning.

Previously, Ms. Ehrenbard was Vice President of Network Systems for Microbrand Corporation, Director of Network Operations for Home Box Office, Inc., Associate Director of Quantu, Science Corporation, and a member of the technical staff at Bell Laboratories.

Ms. Ehrenbard has an M.B.A. from New York University, an M.S. in Electrical Engineering from the University of California, Berkeley, and a B.S. in Engineering from Brown University.

1) How did you get started in the satellite business?

I graduated with a Bachelor in Engineering degree from Brown and a Master's in Electrical Engineering degree from UC Berkeley. I first went to work for Bell Labs on local loop transmission systems. At that time we were developing what would later become the now popular DSL service. Then I moved into Business Consulting for the major Telecom companies before being recruited to work in business development at HBO. It was at HBO where I developed my expertise in the Satellite industry. It was an important time in the Cable programming business and we were developing the concepts that would later become Direct-to-Home satellite services like DirectTV. HBO created a partnership with RCA Americom - now part of SES - that was called Crimson Satellite. It was an early effort aimed at using Ku-band satellites to deliver HBO programming directly to homes. Prior to that only C band was used to deliver HBO to cable headends

2) How have you been involved in changes brought about in or by this business (innovations, technologies, services)?

Migrating the CBS Network from SD to a fully-featured, full-time HD Network has been my greatest challenge to date. Every piece of hardware and software has to be changed out while continuing to operate a flawless CBS programming service. And of course every piece of new hardware and software requires serious regression testing before it will perform flawlessly. Using the same staff to both design and implement a new system as to operate the existing system has been a real but rewarding challenge.

HBO under Ed Horowitz was definitely a visionary leading the way to entirely new distribution system. However at the same time the balance between cable system operators and cable programmers was still being worked through from a business point of view. HBO provided me with an excellent opportunity to work in a business partnership between a satellite operator (RCA Americom) and a key client to bring to the marketplace a truly creative and new offering.

3) What do you think was the greatest event/situation/opportunity you experienced?

I was very fortunate to graduate from college during the time when research and development was still well-funded at major industry vendors and Bell Labs was offering full scholarships to continue the study for Masters degrees. The Masters level year of study was important to both to be more aware of the work being done in industry and to complete the engineering studies.

The biggest change is that there is little money in industry to develop new talent. Every company wants to hire people who are trained and ready to be productive from day one. In scientific fields, there is a longer learning curve to merge the theoretical with the practical and I think there is no longer the opportunity to recent graduates to combine those two important skills.

4) What was the greatest obstacle?

The study of Engineering is the greatest obstacle for any person, male or female. It is the most intensive college curriculum available and therefore quickly weeds out students who do not have the discipline and stamina for a very difficult course of study. For women, it is particularly difficult because the subject matter requires you to focus on a very narrow scientific expertise and that does not readily translate into social conversation. Therefore women often feel isolated during the college years. In addition, there is very little emphasis during the Middle and High school years on the Industrial Arts, otherwise known as shop or electronics labs. Having access to hand-on experience BEFORE going to college makes it more relevant during the study of the theoretical principles underlying the engineering sciences.

5) What advice do you have for women interested in entering the industry?

The hardest part will be the schooling but try to get a strong educational background in the science of satellite communications. Then you will be able to use the knowledge of the underlying principles to work through a long career of business opportunities.

I was always a full time career woman and a full time mom. I do believe that working and particularly enjoying my work sent a strong positive message to my children. I am the proud mother of 3 daughters, all in college this year. The oldest is graduating in International business with a dual degree from ESB in Germany and Northeastern in the US. My second daughter studied Engineering for one year at Brown but then moved into Economics and Applied Math. My third daughter is applying her bright Math skills to the Art world and is a Freshmen at RISD this year, where the new President, John Maeda, is formerly a Professor at MIT.