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Profile of Ellen D. Hoff

Mary Frost

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Ellen D. Hoff
President, W.L. Pritchard & Co., L.C.

Ellen Hoff brings to W. L. Pritchard & Co., L.C. some 40 years experience in international operations, marketing, and corporate planning in the telecommunications industry. She is responsible for strategic market, financial, and competitive business assessments, operations plans, intersystem coordination strategy, and regulatory filings. She has led the preparation and successful coordination of ITU filings for clients, and provided assessments for satellite operators, manufacturers and investors of alternative locations for new filings to maximize usable frequencies.

As senior member of the Corporate Development unit at COMSAT in the 1980s, Ms. Hoff was responsible for the development of business plans to penetrate competitive markets and for analyses of such issues as international service demand and facility supply. As Vice President and General Manager of International Satellite Services, she developed new services in consultation with the company's customers and international partners. By restructuring operations to improve the focus on customers and quality of service, Ms. Hoff enabled COMSAT to achieve 125% growth in new services and 16% growth in established services. As Vice President for International Operations, she was responsible for the engineering, operations and international policy staff. Her interdepartmental task force developed new digital communications services and obtained international agreement to implement these services on the INTELSAT system. Ms. Hoff represented the United States on a number of INTELSAT committees, including those concerned with budgets, business plans, prices, and satellite procurement and deployment. She served for two years as Chairman of the INTELSAT Advisory Committee on Planning, a group of international signatory experts responsible for demand forecasts and satellite procurement.

Ms. Hoff received her B.A. from Harvard University and her M.A. from the George Washington University. She also completed Colgate Darden Business School Executive Management Seminars.

In 2002 she was elected a National Board Member of the Society for Satellite Professionals International (SSPI), and served as President and then Chairman from 2004-2005. She also has served as President of their Mid-Atlantic Chapter. She was Guest Editor of the International Journal of Satellite Communications. She was elected as President of COMARA from 2003-2006. She has organized panels and made presentations at professional conferences such as AIAA, PTC, and Phillips Satellite sessions.

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

I joined Comsat at the end of 1968, to translate into French various materials intended for Francophone African countries on the use of satellites for communications and educational development. This expanded into work with business policy, engineering/operations and other groups, and the more projects I worked on the more exciting the business became.

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

One interesting project was to explain to US carriers and our partners in INTELSAT why adding options for roof-top antennas to the then-standard 30 meter earth stations would open new markets for them. While VSATs are now common in the US and many other countries, it took convincing before the opportunities became evident to some of our customers.

Much of my career in the industry has been spent pulling together engineering and business and regulatory expertise to solve problems and pursue innovations. This has been for me the challenge and the delight of the fast-changing satellite business.

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

One of the more challenging opportunities was to convert our telephony and data business from month-to-month services, to long term capacity leases of power and bandwidth. Among other issues, Marketing thought this was probably useful; Finance thought we would go broke; the lawyers thought the FCC would never agree; Intelsat management disliked the idea intensely; and many of our Intelsat partners were worried that they would lose control over their communications services. The 'tiger team' tackled the issue, with help from many people such as our satellite manufacturers, who came to see the need for predictable capital expenditure profiles. But it took several years to work out the implementation details and get the necessary approvals. I enjoyed pulling this together in particular because we were working with experts from a wide range of specialties and business partners around the globe to develop a new service that benefited our customers and the company, and is now standard in the industry.

4) What was the greatest obstacle?

Two of us were the first non-engineer women professionals hired at Comsat, and there was a long series of being the first to tackle certain assignments. But the advantage of this industry is the large number of very bright people, who are a pleasure to work with.

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

Come on in, space is great! And be prepared to keep learning every day, because many satellites may be geostationary but the customers and their needs are not.