



Mary Gerdts

Building a Company from the Ground Up

Commerce was not a large part of Mary Gerdts' childhood. She grew up in Thomasboro, IL, an 800-resident farming town two-and-a-half hours south of Chicago. "We lived on the proverbial 'wrong side of the tracks,'" says Gerdts. "We were a family of six living in a two-bedroom trailer. We didn't have a lot of money or hope."

After graduating high school, Gerdts went to the University of Illinois to study broadcast journalism. However, she decided the business was too ruthless and dropped out just shy of graduating.

"I didn't have a job or know anyone, but I knew I needed to get to a bigger area," she recalls. So she moved to Chicago where she worked in sales and marketing for a security alarm company, and later a computer graphics firm.

Around 1989, she came across a position in the paper for an ISO in Chicago. "I loved the business instantly, but the company I worked for wasn't the most ethical at that time," Gerdts says. "They didn't always pay me and would often string me along; I'd have to get three more accounts before they would pay the money I was already owed."

Gerdts decided to start her own business. In 1991, she hired a lawyer to help her incorporate. The lawyer did the work gratis, but it took her two years to pay the lawyer back the \$600 it cost to incorporate. She had put \$409.50 in an account, but was told she needed \$500. Gerdts borrowed money from her then-boyfriend (now husband) to make up the difference. "He thought I was nuts," she remembers. "I had no money. My credit was ruined. I had an eviction notice on my apartment because I couldn't pay the rent. I had no assets."

Post Integrations Inc., based in Scottsdale, AZ, was born, but it was still an uphill battle for Gerdts. Unbeknownst to her clients, during the

whole first year of business, Gerdts supported herself by working full-time as a bookkeeper for a catering company. "I had one phone line in my apartment/office. If someone called, I'd get a page. I got the OK to go into a private office whenever I got paged so I could immediately return the calls," she says. "That's how I got the reputation of providing great customer service."

Today, Post Integrations is a provider of credit card and payment processing services exclusively serving the hospi-

she says. "ETA inspires through education sponsorships, events and helps make the industry a more successful industry."

During her 15-plus years in the electronic transactions industry, Gerdts has seen many changes. Where banks used to rule, third parties are now in control. Some banks have even spun off processing companies. ISOs used to run amok. Now, the ETA has brought leadership and guidance to the ISO world. Before, terminals were suffi-

"I had no money. My credit was ruined. I had an eviction notice on my apartment, because I couldn't pay the rent. I had no assets."

tality industry. In addition, Gerdts has started a second company, Ebocom, which provides full-service back office processing; Post Integrations is a client of Ebocom.

Immediately after starting her company, Gerdts got involved in the Electronic Transactions Association (ETA). "Initially, I wasn't doing a lot of traveling. But there was a conference in Chicago, and I used the event to network," she says. She got her big break at the fall meeting in New York. The board slate had already been set, but at the last minute one of the people who was on the board resigned. "The president had the ability to appoint someone to fill the position on the board and I was chosen. And then I had the honor of being voted in for two more terms after that," she says. Gerdts served as president of ETA from 2002 to 2003.

"I believe that one person can make a difference and inspire a whole industry,"

cient. Now, the movement and type of transactions is complex, and terminals are no longer enough. Salespeople need to know the technology side.

She believes the next five years will see some significant changes as well. Those items having the greatest effect will be past and present court cases, as well as other regulatory interest in the electronic transactions industry. "The face of the industry as we have known it for 20 years will change, but we just don't know what direction," she says.

Regardless of what twists and turns the industry takes, Gerdts is determined to take any negatives and turn them into opportunities.

"I believe in Karma. The more I give, the more I get. Above all, I pride myself on being extraordinarily ethical and honest," she says. "You should always do the right thing, and if you were brought up right, you know what that is." **TT**