

Confederacy of Jane

The erstwhile lab researcher took InforMax from virtual anonymity to an industry name. Now she's counting on her drive — and vast web of genomics contacts — to make her own venture a success.

By Meredith W. Salisbury

No matter how confident she appears, Jane Krug still gets nervous during formal presentations to potential clients. After all, she and her three employees — two of whom are part-time — are hardly a match for the dozens-strong full-service marketing, consulting, and communications agencies competing for the same accounts.

But this isn't her first foray into self-employment, and the recently formed Krug Consulting Group is already negotiating contracts with several customers and has officially signed on one, bioinformatics company ExerGen Biosciences. Working for herself clearly suits Krug, 41: "My average day," she says, pausing to consider, "is whatever I want it to be."

After settling the banalities of letterhead, business cards, and bank account, Krug formally launched her business at the CHI Genome Tri-Conference and ever since has been pitching clients. One of her most formidable assets: her cell phone, with its ringer set on Für Elise, has a veritable Who's Who of Genomics stored in its memory. What she calls her "fantastic network" made her last venture, Seeress Marketing and Communications, a success and, according to colleagues, promises to do the same for her latest initiative.

THE ELUSIVE DR. KRUG

If you had asked a teenaged Jane Krug about her future, a career in marketing would have been the furthest thing from her mind. "I always thought I was going to medical school," she recalls. But after completing a degree in biology, doctorhood didn't appeal. She went to work instead at a lab at Litton Bionetics. A year of that brought the realization that "I really needed to understand more what I was doing," she laughs. So

she enrolled part-time in grad school at George Washington University and earned her master's in genetics.

One of her professors there, David Goldman, remembers Krug as a "terrific graduate student, answering every discussion question better than the other students." Impressed by her ability "to project her personality through her work," Goldman recruited her to his NIH lab.

He tried to convince her to go for a PhD. "There were so many brilliant researchers at the NIH," Krug says of why she didn't pursue it. "I thought I was really good technically, but I would never be a brilliant researcher." Eager to stay in the up-and-coming realm of biotech, she agreed to be a sales rep for Digene Diagnostics in 1989 and spent most of her time at the NIH, one of the company's biggest accounts.

But sales wasn't in her stars. After her first year there, Digene slashed its marketing department. "I remember [president] Leon Taub bringing me into the office and telling me that he wanted me to do their marketing. I thought, 'Wait a minute, you understand that I don't know anything about marketing?'" Krug was so worried about the new position that "I made him promise me that if it didn't work out I would get my old job back. But I loved it right from the beginning."

Krug left for Rockville, Md.-based IGEN, where she stayed as marketing manager till 1995. She went through her first IPO there and realized the "night and day" difference between public and private companies. Post-IPO, "you can't really just come up with an idea and run with it," she says.

She decided to strike out for herself, launching Seeress. It lasted four years with long-term clients including Hitachi Genetic Systems (now MiraiBio) and American Type Culture



Photo: Eugenia Uhl

Collection; she deliberately kept the venture small enough to handle by herself. Seeress finally ended when InforMax, another client, made Krug a particularly tempting offer. “They clearly were making a run for something,” she says of the company, which she joined in 1999 as director of marketing communications.

‘POWERHOUSE’ AT WORK

It made all the difference for InforMax, according to people she worked with. Peter Covitz, a former coworker who is now at NCI’s bioinformatics center, calls Krug “a one-woman powerhouse” who got outsiders to think of the company as “a real bioinformatics player.” The key lies in her energy and irrepressible character, Covitz adds. “The great thing about Jane is that she is completely honest and in your face with her point of view ... but she was never acidic or confrontational or demeaning.”

Brian Bullard, previously CIO at AxCell Biosciences, remembers a joint effort between AxCell and InforMax that had not been progressing as hoped. “She stepped into the project [and] made all the difference. It’s what really pushed [it] forward,” he says.

By 2001, InforMax had gone through its IPO — “a lot of fun,” Krug remembers — and had morphed into the public company she didn’t feel as comfortable with. “I was getting antsy. I was thinking more about how much I liked having

clients as opposed to a regular job,” she says. But at the same time, InforMax promoted her to vice president of marketing, so Krug stayed on till last fall before going out on her own. “I knew as soon as I resigned that it was the right thing to do,” she says.

After a three-month holiday, she filed the incorporation paperwork for Krug Consulting Group at the end of February. “I decided to make it a real business,” she says, instead of keeping it small like Seeress. “[I’m] going to take it to the next level this time.”

Client relationships tend to start small. Usually it begins with Krug putting together a newsletter, ad, or brochure for a company — that’s when people realize “she might really know

what she’s talking about,” Krug says. For full-time clients, she’ll do anything from giving strategy workshops to event planning to designing websites or ad campaigns.

JANE BE JANE

It seems no one can talk about Jane Krug without using these four words: energy, style, and New Orleans. Krug went to the Big Easy for the first time some 12 years ago. “I just fell in love with the place,” she recalls. After a decade of traveling there on spare weekends from her home in Baltimore, she finally bought a condo on Royal Street in the French quarter. What she calls her “sanctuary” is fairly small — maybe 400 square feet, she guesses — and has the old-style character she demands of a home: her unit is in the old slave quarters of an 1800s-era mansion and opens onto an enclosed courtyard.

Everyone, apparently, knows of Krug’s passion for the city, and she shamelessly promotes it. When friends go there for the first time, she buys them *A Confederacy of Dunces*, John Kennedy Toole’s farcical portrayal of life in New Orleans.

“It’s very much a live-and-let-live kind of place. You can go there and party all the time or just totally chill, and either one’s fine,” says Krug, who’s been known to exercise either option — and who packed her condo sardine-style with industry friends and potential clients at a bash she threw during a recent conference there. It was quite a celebration: “This is a great time in my life,” Krug says.

