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**HANNAH KAIN**

**ALOM Technologies Corporation**



By Ryan Hamilton

# Supplying Demand





**By fostering a collaborative work environment, Hannah Kain has kept her company at the forefront of supply-chain management.**



After working at a number of different firms in her native Denmark, **Hannah Kain**, founder, president and CEO of **ALOM Technologies Corporation**, knew she wanted to steer her career path toward managing supply chains. “I’ve always thought supply chain was very interesting—even before ‘supply chain’ became a known word in the business vocabulary,” she says.

Having worked with large manufacturers, Kain sought work with smaller firms to improve her first-hand knowledge of how they operate. “I worked in a very interesting job in the financial sector where I was part of starting up companies—a very entrepreneurial job,” she says. “I learned how things work when you’re trying to start up. I also learned about American business practices. I adopted some, but I stick to a lot of Danish practices, as well.”

Kain enjoyed the entrepreneurial aspects of the job, but she differed with her bosses on business ethics, and decided to hang out her own shingle. “I resigned fairly abruptly,” she says. “I [just] closed my eyes and jumped. I went home and negotiated with my husband. We took a big part of our assets and put it into ALOM. Some of my friends questioned my business decision, but now, no one does.”

Kain then shopped around for a Small Business Administration (SBA) loan, doing presentations at 24 different banks before she found one that would back her. The startup wasn’t easy, though; ALOM had to make major purchases to be competitive in the field. “You buy inventory; you buy forklifts,” Kain says. “It’s not easy to start out when you don’t have significant capital. We learned early on to be disciplined to have the inventory we need. That has been something that has stayed with us—something that has made us more competitive. Three years after [I received the SBA loan], I was named the SBA Success Story of the Year, and we continued to grow.”

**T**oday ALOM is a global leader in supply chain management, serving as a partner to its Fortune 100 clients by seamlessly conducting their key business functions from manufacturing to marketing. “We are very proud of the collective strengths of our extensive team—including strategists, engineers, and specialists,” Kain says. “Together I can rely on them to deliver our clients’ products and services impeccably, enrich the customer experience, and uphold their brand reputations.

Based in Silicon Valley, ALOM has 15 affiliated facilities across the globe with a combined multi-million square feet of inventory space, and a combined million square feet in global printing facilities. “We help very big corporations with time-critical, mission-critical parts of their supply chain,” Kain says. “We do a great deal of contract manufacturing [and] packaging as well as procurement and distribution. We are managing the entire supply chain, doing most of it in-house, and all over the globe.

Kain’s firm often comes in early, helping get the project off the ground and serving as the main point of contact in the electronics part of the supply chain. One such project was with Ford Motor Company. “They were installing new technology in their vehicles,” Kain says. “They called us in and asked us for ideas on how to manage the supply chain. That included finding suppliers and subcontractors. Then we helped set up a collaborative workflow with whoever else was involved. We managed the documentation, working to try to optimize the supply chain, save money, save time, and increase quality. That is what we do for companies.”

Kain says that ALOM’s supply-chain specialization predates the popularization of the supply-chain

concept. “Supply chain, as we know it, is a concept that is between seven and 10 years old,” she says. “ALOM is



Kain, at one of ALOM’s California-based production facilities.

16 years old. We were definitely there before ‘supply chain’ was a fancy term.” As the term became more popular, the industry became more competitive—and more complex. “You have to buy materials from different locations, manufacture in different locations, and then sell in different locations. We manage that complexity for our customers.”

The company is ISO 9000-certified, and has also completed the ISO 13485 certification process for medical device specialization. Kain reports that ALOM started working in the automotive field in the last five years, and has been fulfilling contracts with the federal and local governments since 1999.

Kain says ALOM’s “most fun” project is working with the **California Children and Families Commission (CCFC)** which helps new parents through the first five years of their child’s life. “When you have a baby, it doesn’t come with an instruction manual,” she says. “We work with publishers, vendors, county governments, hospitals, doctors, and so on. We put together this kit that has different materials in it, and distribute it. It is mostly literature, but for different counties, there are different elements. There is research showing that parents [who receive the kit] become better

parents. We like to contribute to social causes like that.”

In addition to running the printing presses that produce the literature for CCFC, ALOM operates high-tech manufacturing facilities in California, including the largest digital duplication center in the U.S. At the facility, ALOM can transfer data directly to SD cards and USB drives, which helps distribute information on digital platforms.

Kain focused on achieving high-quality results from the outset. “That has been a wonderful discipline that we have been able to maintain,” she says. “We set the world standard in quality. That has been very exciting for me—my vision was and is to be the quality leader in the industry.” And for Kain, quality means getting it right the first time. “Any time you need to go in and correct an error, it is very costly and very demoralizing.”

**M**orale is another of Kain’s pre-occupations. She champions a collaborative working environment at ALOM that focuses on employee satisfaction, diversity, inclusion, and information sharing. “I think we’re living in a much more collaborative world now,” she says. “We have very much a team model internally, and a team model with our customers. We truly work with our customers to make sure they get what they need.”

Kain believes that whoever can collaborate the most effectively will ultimately achieve the biggest success. “I try to have a company culture that is collaborative,” she says. “I won an award for collaboration a few years back—I was proud of that.”

She credits this to her experience with Danish business practices. “I think Danes are much more collaborative,” she says. “Many of American businesses haven’t discovered that. I started early in Denmark, [where]

it is about the results you create as a team.

“Danes are pretty anti-authoritarian,” she continues. “I love when my staff members tell me things they think I don’t want to hear—I actually *want* to hear those things. It takes



ALOM's Fremont, California-based headquarters.

working here a couple of years before people come out and say the things they actually think. I try to get them to open up sooner. I like to get people to open up and tell me when they think I am about to step on the [proverbial] land mine.”

In addition to fostering an open, collaborative environment, Kain is committed to a diverse workforce at her company. “It is part of our DNA,” she states bluntly. “We have tremendous diversity here. The other part is to be very performance-driven, so we look at what people do and not who they are. We also try to have a culture of compassion. We try to be supportive of people, who they are, what they need, [and] where they’re at in their lives.”

Part of that means working with an understanding of people’s particular challenges. “When women get pregnant, and they need a different type of support through that and for the first few years after,” Kain says. “We are supportive and compassionate during those periods. I know this doesn’t sound like hard advice, but that is the basis of our diversity.”

ALOM also has a robust supplier diversity program that is committed to meeting and exceeding expectations

on diversity spend. “When corporations do business with us, we’re a woman-owned company,” Kain says. “We also have a very high Tier 2 spend. We spend a lot of resources finding minority vendors that are really competent. I am out there in the community all the time. I come back with a lot of business cards, and so does my purchasing staff.”

Kain has dedicated herself to advancing diversity in business, particularly when it comes to advocating for women in executive positions. She is active in the **Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC)** and **Astra Women’s Business Alliance**, the

regional partner organization that supports women-owned businesses in the Pacific Northwest including Northern California. She also serves on the board of **Watermark**, an organization that helps with the development of women executives. Additionally, Kain is active in the **Committee of 200**, an organization whose membership includes the top 400 female business executives in the world. To be eligible for membership, a candidate must be female and fully responsible for the gains and losses of a company that has \$20 million or more in annual revenues.

**Diane McClelland**, president and CEO of Astra, confirms Kain’s commitment. “Hannah Kain is a great example of a leader who has built a successful enterprise that continues to grow each year due to her diligence and dedication to excellent service for her customers.” She continues, “Hannah demonstrates her pay-it-forward attitude through her mentorship of smaller companies and her sponsorship of both Astra and WBENC events. She is active on several non-profit boards and continues to be a role model for other business leaders.”

“I think doing women’s development is tremendously important,”

Kain says of her nonprofit work. “I have been fortunate to have had a number of people take an interest in me and help me along my way. It is time for me to pay it forward. When you invest in women, it pays off manifold. I am involved in women’s causes on different levels—[like] **Women’s Initiative**, which helps very low-income women work their way out of poverty by starting their own businesses. Every dollar invested there gets about \$30 back to the community.”

As a part of the program, women are given a basic training program that teaches them business skills and self-confidence. “By the end of the program, many women have tripled their household incomes in one-and-a-half years,” Kain says. “It shows the multiplier effect of giving training, giving support, and doing outreach. I think it is the same on the executive level—though it may not move as fast. It is a big problem that women aren’t on the boards or in the executive suites.”

Kain believes that this is a persistent problem. “Right now, everyone is involved in the Twitter IPO, and Twitter doesn’t have any women on its executive board or in their executive ranks,” she says. “All research shows you get much higher returns when you have a more diverse executive level and management board. It is just amazing to me, in 2013, that we are still having these types of problems. Whatever I can do to help remedy that, I will.”

Kain’s advocacy work has not gone unnoticed by her peers. “Hannah is one of the most dynamic and inspiring leaders I have met in my career,” says **Bethany Mayer**, a C200 member and the senior vice president and general manager of networking at the **Hewlett-Packard Company**. “She sets a new high bar for women leaders.”

**K**ain holds degrees from the University of Odense and Aarhus, as well as the Business School of South Jutland in Denmark, and also lists among her accomplishments a book, published in Danish, about market analysis that was used in college classrooms for approximately 15 years. Part of what drove her to write a book is what drives her belief in collaboration. “I love sharing information and giving everyone enough information to make their own judgments. They don’t need to go back and forth to me.”

Kain has been active in international politics, and once served in the *Folketing* (Danish Parliament) when the incumbent was unable to serve. “I was a member for a shorter period of time,” she says. “I did other things that were equally interesting—I was part of the UN General Assembly.

“Being in politics gave me the opportunity to work with some very impressive personalities,” she adds. “One of those people later became the Commissioner of the European Union, another is currently Secretary General at NATO. You work with people like that, [and] you glean ideas about how to be effective, how to move things along, how to manage relationships. You learn a lot from being around impressive people. If you open yourself up and absorb the gifts people can give you, you can really grow.”

Kain has been married to fellow Dane Jakob Nielsen since 1984. She enjoys spending her free time with him, and, in spite of an aggressive business-travel schedule, the two do find time to travel for pleasure. “Often we just set aside a time,” she says.

“We are also very much into the arts. We support the local ballet, opera and museums. I am also a heavy-duty



ALOM operates the largest SD data transferring facility in the United States.

reader. I make it through a couple of books a week,” Kain notes, including many books about others’ life experiences—books where she can glean advice from others who have taken different paths. “Occasionally, I like to be at home and relax. I have many friends I like to be with that I have met through my activities. I try to free up my calendar to be with them.”

Kain is also a devoted gourmand. “I am a true food lover, and enjoy great restaurants,” she says. “I also love to cook, and some of my friends feel that I should have become a chef. It is very relaxing and therapeutic for me to create [a meal]. Just like with supply chain, you have unforeseen events when cooking. The similarity between cooking and supply chain is probably one of the reasons why I love supply-chain [management]: You have a lot going on, and everything needs to come together into this perfect harmony at the right time, making everything seem effortless.” ♦



**Ryan Hamilton**  
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