



The 15-Year Overnight Sensation

Navigating the road to success.

By Amy Elizabeth Goudy

In January 2007, at the International Consumer Electronics Show, **Ford Motor Company** unveiled SYNC, an in-car connectivity system that helps drivers control their mobile devices such as cell phones and MP3 players using voice recognition. Listening to the Ford executives discuss the need for automotive companies to become technology leaders, **Hannah Kain**, CEO and founder of **ALOM** (Advanced Logistics Operations & Manufacturing), located in Fremont, California, took the words as an open invitation. "We knew we could bring Ford the innovation the company was looking for."

Having been certified since 2001 through the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) regional



Kain (right) receives recognition as a WBENC Star from Diane McClelland (left), president/CEO, Astra, and Pamela Prince-Eason, president, WBENC

partner Astra Women's Business Alliance, Kain knew if she attended the matchmaker meetings being held during the WBENC National



Hannah Kain



Lisa Dolan

Conference, she could have a one-on-one conversation with representatives from Ford. A deal didn't happen overnight but the journey brought ALOM (pronounced "A-loam") to new heights as a supply-chain management company. Today, ALOM's work supporting Ford SYNC will contribute an estimated \$20 million to the company's bottom line in 2012.

Kain founded ALOM in 1997 and from the beginning her commitment to quality drove the Fremont, California-based company. Within a year, the supply-chain company received ISO certification. ALOM grew quickly the first decade with Fortune 100 companies who needed the fulfillment and supply chain services ALOM offered. It was pivotal time in OEM manufacturing when outsourcing allowed companies to focus on core competencies and develop new products. ALOM continued to bust at the seams until, in 2005, Kain moved the company into a facility that gave it the largest assembly capacity on the West Coast. In 2006, the same year that ALOM received an award from Cisco Systems for operational excellence, Kain launched ALOM Europe, where her international background has served her well.

Born in Denmark, Kain served on several prestigious commissions in

her home country, a board member of the Danish National Research Foundation in the early 1980's and has supported science and STEM activities in different capacities, most recently as a board member of the National Association of Manufacturers. Kain was a member of the Danish parliament for several short periods. She also was member of

the parliamentary delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. As a CEO with degrees in political science, communications, and marketing, Kain put her persuasive powers to use, meeting with key customers, suppliers, and competitors. Ultimately, the connections she made would help put her on Ford's radar.

Right place, right time, right services

SYNC had been an option in Ford vehicles but they needed a better

way to update the navigation map data that is available for the MyFord Touch system. Kain quickly called a meeting of her sales team. This was no ordinary opportunity. Companies often put out a request for proposal (RFP) and award a contract based on pricing and delivery. But in this case, Ford was looking for the best technology solution plus a partner who could facilitate everything from media duplication to packaging to fulfillment. No small order.

Kain knew that ALOM could deliver a total solution. So did her vice president of strategic sales, **Lisa Dolan**. "We won't bid on projects [unless] we can fully support [them] at the highest level," says Dolan. "What helps us gain customers is our scalability, the ability to bring in a project at small level and being able to grow it to a large volume."

Demonstrating that to Ford took time.

"When we first met with ALOM, the fact that they were a woman business enterprise (WBE) was a plus, but what we really cared about was, 'Can they do this project? Can they deliver what we want?'" recalls **Chuck Broadwater**, SYNC software applications and hardware navigation engineer, for Ford. Could ALOM deliver? From 2007 to 2009, Broadwater and the Ford team would find out. The two companies started brainstorming. "The ALOM team delivered

a number of concepts and together we figured out what we wanted," says Broadwater. One idea was an SD (secure digital) Memory card to store updated navigation maps and voice-recognition software. Ford was sold.

ALOM won the contract in 2009 and began production in March of 2010.

The contract was awarded due to a number of different elements includ-



ALOM created a packaging and insert design for the Ford SYNC upgrade delivery system via custom loaded SD cards

ing ALOM's client list, its creativity and capabilities. Those capabilities included Vendor Managed Inventory (VMI) procurement, kitting, hand assembly, configuration, media duplication, replication, item fulfillment, and global distribution from 15 locations.

"This is a completely new product offering for Ford," says Broadwater. "We have never had an SD card." He adds that ALOM went "over and above" to make sure the product met Ford standards. ALOM created a packaging solution, helped with design, insert design, and provided programming. SD card delivery started out with 2011 Edge and MKX models and will expand across the entire Ford line of vehicles over the next few model years.

But it was the level of support that sealed the deal. In 2010, ALOM launched Compass, a global customer portal for monitoring and managing the supply chain that provides up-to-the-minute tracking, "actionable alerts," and custom reporting across the entire supply chain. Compass was just the direction Ford wanted.

"Additionally, they hired a dedicated resource for the project to ensure that we have the best support possible," says Broadwater. "They can support emergency situations faster than anyone I have ever seen. Their business is fulfillment and so they know how to support us."

Case in point: In August 2012, ALOM provided MyFord Touch software performance updates on over 400,000 USB sticks and directed Ford customers on how to recycle their old

SD cards.

In 2011, ALOM's sales grew a whopping 65 percent. While ALOM does not publish financials, it has been recognized as one of the largest woman-owned companies in the U.S. With nearly 200 employees and contract workers at their U.S. headquarters, and a total of 3000 workers spread out across all global partner-locations, Kain expects to grow another 60 percent this year. Plans include opening a partner location in Latin America later this year and service expansions into new segments, including telecommunications. The projected growth for 2013 is approximately 45 percent.

Looking back, Kain says that initial matchmaker meeting and WBENC certification opened a door but it took much more to walk through. "The reason we were granted the contract was because we were the best company for the job. It wasn't because we were a woman-owned business," says Kain, who has won numerous leadership awards. "The diversity status opens a door for dialog but if we aren't the best company for the job, we aren't going to get the business, nor should we."

That said, she's grateful for the support. "[Ford] is a wonderful organization that takes the time to invest in giving suppliers a path. For me, one of the most wonderful aspects is

having people who have a commitment to supporting their suppliers. Ford does an amazing job of that," says Kain. Some examples of that support include extending Ford's own



ALOM media room.

matchmaking events and including ALOM (and other suppliers) to tie in with Ford prime suppliers. Also, the company has introduced ALOM to different key businesses, as they work toward identifying new projects. Most recently, Ford managers promoted the Ford-ALOM partnership in their booth at the WBENC National Conference in Orlando, providing inspiration to other corporations and WBEs, and bringing the relationship full circle. ♦

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