

Laid-back scene belies a hard-charging Worktank

By GREG LAMM
STAFF WRITER

When Leslie Rugaber and Melinda Partin decided to launch their own advertising agency in 2001, they each kicked in \$15,000, mindful of the adage that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

"We saw we could create something bigger together," said Rugaber, Worktank's "chief story teller," who has a background in producing programming for PBS.

Their first client was Microsoft, where the pair had met while working on marketing, interactive and video production products. Today, Microsoft remains a major client for Worktank, which has about a dozen other clients and annual revenues of \$6.25 million.

"We want to win their hearts and minds."

MELINDA PARTIN
WORKTANK

The company has grown rapidly in the past three years. In 2005, Worktank had 22 employees and revenue of about \$1.26 million.

Worktank employs 70 people out of a 14,000-square-foot loft at the lower edge of Seattle's Queen Anne neighborhood, and has all the trappings of a laid-back ad shop. The company accommodates staffers who want to work flexible schedules. Worktank also is a dog-friendly workplace and has perks such as plasma TVs, video games and board games to allow people to unwind.

But Rugaber and Partin say they are all business when it comes to as-

sisting their clients. Worktank is on track to have about \$10 million this year, said Partin. The company once had an optimistic projection of seeing \$14 million in revenue for 2008, before the slowdown in the economy. And even as it has grown rapidly, the company has had to trim its staff since last November.

The company has a client list that still includes Microsoft, as well as heavy-hitters in telecom, including T-Mobile and AT&T. Worktank's services include providing branding, interactive, advertising and event planning.

Worktank was behind a national TV commercial for handset maker

HTC's promotion of AT&T's smart phone earlier this year. And the company also has helped promote T-Mobile products by developing a marketing, training and rewards program for sales representatives who work in retail outlets that sell mobile phones.

"We want to win their hearts and minds," said Partin, Worktank's CEO, whose background also includes working in the nonprofit world, including Chicken Soup Brigade, a food and nutrition program for people with HIV/AIDS in King County.



Partin

Microsoft accounts for about 40 percent of Worktank's business, and the partners said their goal is to broaden their client list so they are not so dependent on one company. Partin and Rugaber said they think they are positioned to have a sustainable business even if the economy worsens, because of their focus on Microsoft and cell-phone companies.

"But I don't think anybody knows where this is heading," said Partin, who said the company's goal is to keep its staffing at pace with its business growth. "We'll just have to see where things go."

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Fiscal year	Total operating revenue	No. of employees
2005	\$1.26M	22
2006	\$4.11M	37
2007	\$6.25M	75