



RICHARD ARLESS JR. The Gazette

Lianne Bridges (sitting) and (from left) Eva Kutyla, Chris Kutyla, Frank Renzelli and Vincent Mecca run independent companies that often team up to offer clients full marketing services.

Alliance is custom-made

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Lianne Bridges and Eva Kutyla didn't set out to create a new business model. But, necessity being the mother of invention and these two women being mothers, they seem to have done just that. What's more, this is the kind of business model that embodies the way in which work has been changing in the past decade to jibe with people's lifestyles.

Let's start with the necessity. Five years ago, Bridges, a marketing executive who had enjoyed a 15-year career in the private and nonprofit

As a home-based worker, Mecca said being connected to others in the same situation permits him, to overcome isolation and to bounce ideas off others.

Each member of the alliance maintains his or her own clients, but often, they discover that their clients need more than one service so they call upon the help of the other group members. "We work independently and come together when we need to," Bridges said.

"I love the idea that if I have a customer who wants me to design a Web site, I can also bring in a marketing person who can help the client decide

Choose partners carefully

'You're only as good as the weakest link'

It's not surprising that people have asked Lianne Bridges and her fellow alliance

sectors, moved from Toronto to Montreal to get married. Eager to start a family, she decided to be self-employed so she'd be able to juggle work and children.

"I also had no business contacts in this city so I started my own marketing company, **Bridges Marketing**," Bridges said. "My expertise is in branding strategies, but when I began to get work. I sometimes found it difficult to get my clients to see the end benefits of the strategies I devised. I needed someone else to help me make those strategies tangible. My services could go only so far. Advertising agencies have a range of services. They have the suits, people like me who devise the strategy, and they have the creative people to come up with ideas. I was a suit who needed a creative person."

That's where the invention comes in. Four years ago, Bridges, by then pregnant with her first child, happened to be working on contract for a company when she met Eva Kutyla, a graphic designer.

Kutyla was one of the creative people who had come to realize that she needed to ally herself with a "suit."

"I can't go far with my creativity unless I have strategy behind me," said Kutyla, who runs a company called **E.A.C.H. NEW DESIGN** with her brother, Chris Kutyla.

So the two women decided to forge an alliance, except that they wouldn't be partners in the same business. They'd each run their own companies and come together on projects to offer clients the range of services large advertising agencies offer.

Two more people, each with his own business, would soon join the mix. Vincent Mecca, who does Web design

Having an alliance of companies has enabled the partners to maintain tight control over their careers.

With his company, **ARTEC Interactive**, and Frank Renzelli, who does technical support with **iTech Consulting**, came on board, and they've all become a kind of virtual advertising agency without the big overhead that such companies carry.

The alliance is ideal for companies that can't afford to hire large agencies," Renzelli, 25, said.

where they want to go with it and what they want to achieve," Mecca said.

Bridges said the alliance works in the opposite way of traditional advertising agencies.

"In an agency, new clients deal with the junior person while the senior executive is in the background directing the junior. With us, it's the other way around. Clients deal with the partners and we bring in juniors on contract," she said.

Among their clients are **Kaycan**, a home-siding company, the **YMCA**, **Noble Packaging**, the Quebec Association for Adult Learning, The Quebec Literacy Working Group and a wealth management team within the **Royal Bank of Canada**.

Having an alliance of companies has also enabled the partners to maintain tight control over their careers.

Bridges, a mother of two, works from her Hudson home, enabling her to juggle work and child care. "Our business is custom-fitted for what our clients need, but it's also custom-fitted for our lifestyles," she said.

Kutyla, who has an office near her St. Laurent home, drops off her one-year-old at her parents' east-end home every day before starting her workday at 9 a.m. At 3:30 p.m., she picks up her 5-year-old son at school and takes him back to her office, where he reads, does arts and crafts and plays educational games on a computer until it's time to pick up his baby brother and head home for dinner. "I take work home with me," Kutyla said. "But if I need to go to the doctor or handle emergencies during the day, I can."

She said the alliance has permitted her to get support from her colleagues.

"Lianne helped me a lot when I was pregnant last year," Kutyla said. "I was setting up a photo shoot for a catalogue on the day I went into labour. When she was in the workforce, Lianne used to approve photography for set designs for commercials, so she was able to help me:"

The alliance members - who are spread throughout the city in Anjou, St. Leonard, Hudson and St. Laurent - meet once a month to brainstorm.

"When you're a small business, you can share your expertise with the others and discuss problems," Bridges said.

The partners believe that the sum of their parts

members for advice about setting up their own small-business alliances.

"We tell them to take their time in selecting the right partners," Bridges said. "You're only as good as the weakest link in your organization, and if one of your partners can't deliver, you might lose a client, damaging your reputation within that industry."

Moreover, Eva Kutyla said, seek out diversity in the person-

It's important to ensure that each person bring different and complementary skills to the group.

abilities of the alliance members "because if you're all the same, it's boring. If you have different personalities, you're constantly being challenged within the group." It's also important to ensure that each person bring different and complementary skills to the group, she said.

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"We're small businesses that want to give other small businesses the services that bigger businesses enjoy."

Mecca had met Kutyla through a friend. "She outsourced some work to me," he said, adding that he later met with Kutyla, Bridges and Renzelli to discuss working in a business alliance. "We saw that it could work quite well."

makes them stronger than if they were labouring alone. "We all have contacts in different industries," Bridges said. "I couldn't sell the services Eva has to offer and she couldn't sell the services I have to offer, but when we come together with a proposal, it's full service."