

# LAYLA MASRI, Bean Creative Web Design

By Iris Wiener

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When Layla Masri started her Virginia-based Web-design company, Bean Creative, in 1997, she had no financial backing, no equipment and a staff of two—herself included. Today, her brainchild is one of the country's top Web site development firms, boasting a diverse clientele that includes PBS, *Fortune* magazine and the American Red Cross. Here, Masri talks to *figure* about building a company, working with family and succeeding as a woman in a male-dominated field.



Masri is a Superwoman at Bean—she juggles budgets, client services and bringing in new business.

## Why did you decide to start Bean Creative?

I'd been working in advertising for eight years, and I was beginning to feel stifled. I wanted to pick my own accounts and take the lead, creatively. When I work on things that I'm really interested in and confident about, it shows; more so than when I'm working just to pay the bills.

## Did you start the business alone?

Keith Soares—who's now my husband—started Bean with me. He's the designer, and I bring in business, work with clients and manage budgeting and scheduling. We had no venture capitalist backing us when we started, so we had to buy everything out of pocket. It was stressful because we were dating then, and I think my family was concerned that neither of us were financially stable.

## So it must have felt fantastic when you made your first sale.

The first sale was great, because it meant validation. The client met with several other companies before deciding to work with us. In the end, he told us he thought Bean Creative was the best. That was exhilarating; it was the first time we received approval from someone other than a relative or friend.

## What do you consider to be the greatest strength of Bean Creative?

We're successful because we don't try to make every Web site look like Bean

Creative. Instead, we work hard to match the work with the client. We find out as much as we can about who our client is, who their customers are and what types of goals they have for their customers online. Our goal is to create a persona for their company on the Web, whether it's funky and modern, sophisticated and elegant, or clean and spare.

## Has being a woman affected your business experience?

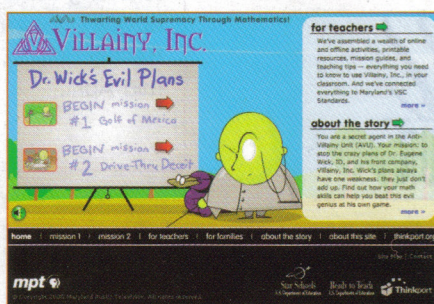
As a woman, I'm a novelty in the techie world. Many male IT directors are surprised to see me walk in the door to talk about technology, so I have to prove that I really know what I'm talking about. On the other hand, when I meet with marketing folks, who are often female, they're excited to have a woman talking about technology—it can work in my favor.

## What would you tell a woman who is considering starting a business?

Start a business that you really, truly enjoy, because it's going to require a tremendous amount of time and energy.

Also, develop a network of people who are happy to answer your questions. Take other business owners out to dinner and pick their brains about what works best for them. Don't feel shy about asking people for help; just make sure you do something really nice to thank them.

Most importantly, you have to take the setbacks in stride. Acknowledge your mistakes and think positively about how you can do better in the future.



Bean Creative designed this Web site for Villainy, Inc.

For more information about Layla Masri or Bean Creative, visit [beancreative.com](http://beancreative.com)