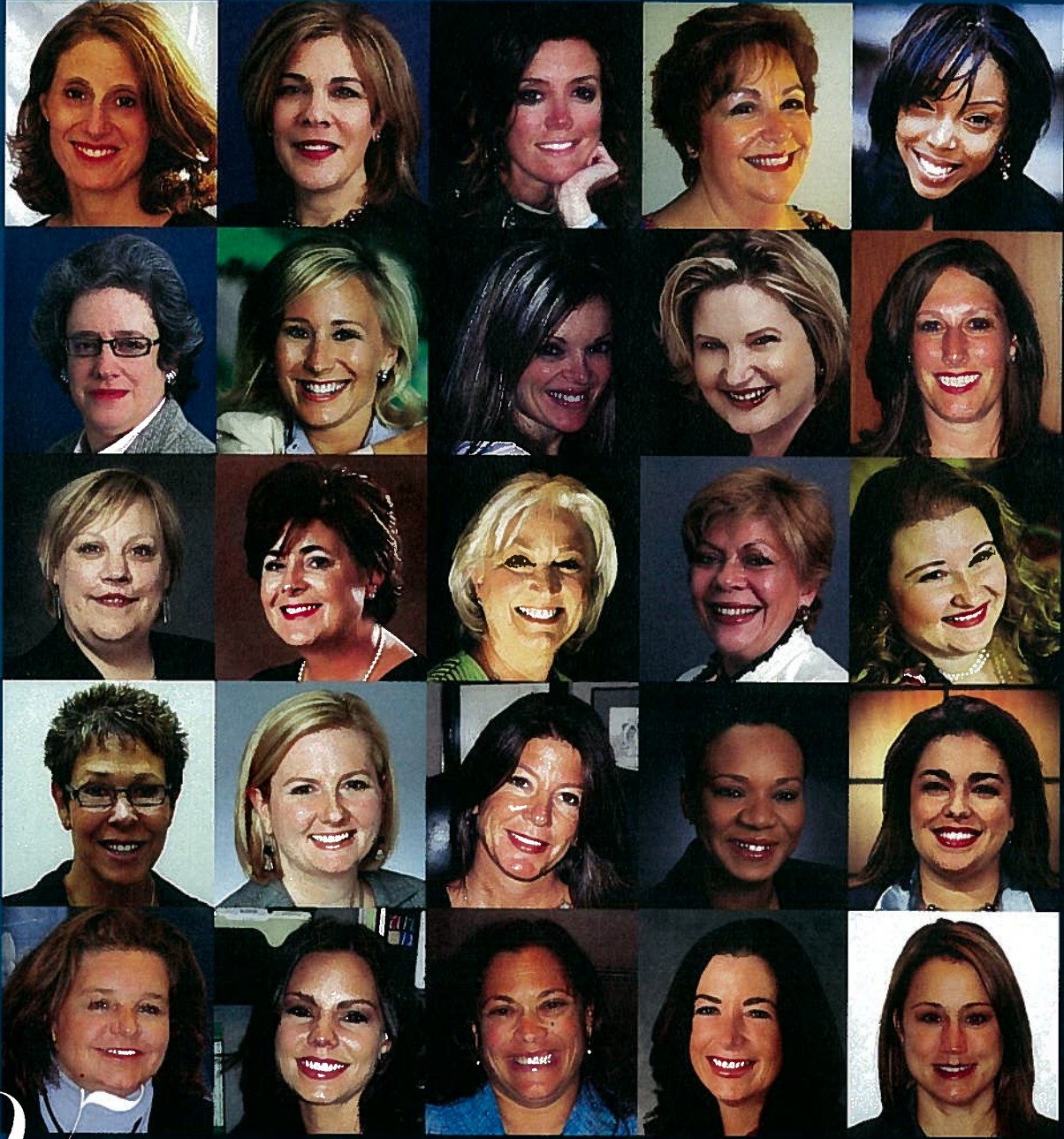


MAKING

WAVES

NO. 3 2008 PUBLISHED BY AMERICAN WOMEN IN RADIO & TELEVISION

PROMOTING PROGRESS. CREATING CHANGE



25 WOMEN WHO *RULE* IN SALES & MARKETING

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S. Jenell Trigg: The World's Her Stage



'I stepped out of my comfort zone to give myself some life skills. I challenge others to consider doing the same thing. Just doing the same old same old isn't going to cut it.'

When S. Jenell Trigg graduated from Northwestern with a degree in theatre arts, she wasn't exactly star-struck by the thought of a career in broadcasting or law.

"I had planned on doing *Dreamgirls* on Broadway, not telecom law in D.C.," she laughs. But after a 16-year career in sales and marketing at television stations in Chicago and Baltimore, Trigg opted to attend law school while continuing to work full-time. Stints with the Federal Communications Commission and U.S. Small Business Administration followed, as did as her role as the first executive director and COO of The Telecom Opportunity Institute (TOI), a non-profit that promotes career opportunities for disadvantaged youth, minorities, and women. Now a partner at Leventhal Senter & Lerman, Trigg focuses on telecommunications, media, privacy and data security issues, as well as government regulation of the Internet.

Trigg sat down with *Making Waves* to talk about the changing media landscape, introducing young people to jobs behind the camera, and how a pen name she picked as a 12-year-old helped propel her career into the limelight.

What about the television industry appealed to you? TV was the closest thing to the theatre and performing with a steady paycheck. My first broadcasting job was as a sales account executive at WMAQ-TV in Chicago. I crashed a VIP cocktail party and talked my way into a job interview. I had to sell myself first.

I didn't stay in the sales department. I wanted to know people, know why and how things were done. The first day, I walked around and sat down in the newsroom. People didn't have a clue who I was. I joined NBC at a time when the network was fourth in the market, so I had to find creative ways to sell our programming. Sometimes our programming specials came out of some-

thing a client would be willing to sponsor I'd take to the programming department.

What were some of your challenges? When there was undue friction, I didn't know at any given time what people didn't like about me—was it because I was a woman, or because I was African American? S. Jenell came from my pen name—I've used it since I was about 12 years old. I kept it as a business name because people couldn't develop preconceived notions about me.

Why make the jump from sales and marketing to law? The industry changed dramatically in the early 1990s. I loved the industry, but I felt very vulnerable. I wanted to move into different areas and felt that as an African American woman, I needed more than just an undergraduate degree in theatre arts.

I was also frustrated by the regulatory changes that impacted my job as a sales manager. I wondered whether the FCC really understood the business of broadcasting.

What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in terms of ensuring diversity online and in other forms of media? The real challenge is how do you get new, different voices—not just a different channel—from the same company? While the opportunities are unbelievable, the practical reality is how you execute and monetize programming in today's world. Advertisers want more and more proof of performance and don't want to pay the full value of CPM for certain content. Additionally, viewers may not want to pay for content.

I still find some of the same hurdles and discriminatory business practices from the analog days in the digital world, and that's unfortunate. I'd put that as a challenge to the industry—while our programming is diverse, how do we ensure that the people making the decisions are just as diverse?

How do you get disadvantaged youth interested in careers in telecommunications?

You expose them to the different businesses, inform them about employment and educational opportunities, and teach them life skills.

In television, most young people only want to be anchors, reporters and videographers because that is all they see. They don't know about the other important jobs—general managers, sales, promotion, engineering, producers, writers, etc. They do not know why it is important to have control and hiring and firing authority, and to influence content.

When I was in Chicago, I hosted a "shadow day" for underprivileged children. By the end of the day, many of them saw a whole new world open up.

At TOI, we partnered with the public schools in Houston and Los Angeles to teach Internet skills to underserved children and their parents. We also introduced successful people of color in the communications industry to talk about their jobs and how they got there.

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing broadcast and new media companies going forward? How to make content interesting, accurate, and relevant—not just filler for a 24-hour news day. How to increase diversity of sources of content and more antagonistic voices. Copyright and protection of all intellectual property in a digital world. And how to recruit and, more importantly, retain good personnel.

And for people working in the industry?

Law school was my 40th birthday present to myself. I stepped out of my comfort zone to give myself new life skills. I challenge others to consider stepping out of their comfort zone. Just doing the same old same old isn't going to cut it—not in today's environment. 📣