

Adztech Remains Optimistic and Utilized Valuable Resources and Technology Depsite Pandemic Challenges

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Businesses and consumers alike are finding ways to adapt and stay resilient during these unprecedented times. Though recovery may take time, the strength and resilience of entrepreneurialism and grit of small business owners is strong and present. Small business owners like Geraldine Leon Guerrero, President and General Manager of Adztech & Public Relations, Inc., a full-service marketing, advertising, event management and publication firm, remain optimistic that their businesses will overcome any present and future obstacle with the right resources and preparedness.

Adztech & Public Relations, Inc. has been in business for more than 16 years. The business started on Halloween, October 31, 2005. They were previously called "Images Advertising", and decided to migrate over, close up "Images" and start up Adztech. With Images, the products and services being provided were a little bit different because the technology was very limited. There has been a shift in business strategy and focus since the company first began. Because of the limited technology, "conventional marketing" was used, and the company was in to doing a lot of graphic work. Now, everything is online and valuable resources, time and money have been saved over time due to advancement in

equipment, software, and technology. The company has been able to service more clients quickly and not use up too much paper, which was what was being done before under "Images".

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the course of many businesses in our region and across the world. This was no exception for Adztech & Public Relations, Inc. Fortunately, for this small business, they had to continue services and were deemed "essential" because they are the forefront of messaging. Getting advertising and messaging out to the community allowed them to continue services, which has helped them continue operations although they were limited on their office hours. Adapting and pivoting quickly, business owner Geri allowed for her team to migrate to both a work at home business

orders. With dependence mainly on migrating operations virtually for her company and many of her clients, a lot more work was done online, and more focus-based projects that were not very tangible (for instance, website development, social media management and blogging and information for virtual events and webinars) increased exponentially. Her company was able to help a couple of private companies host their first online webinars that was posted via Facebook. The team took that time to master the art of Zoom, and those are just some of the ways the company has pivoted throughout the pandemic.

Other notable events that the company was able to contribute to was the virtual Guam Women's Chamber of Commerce event "Fanachu Fama-lao'an". Geri was part of the committee for the event. Because her company and experience with using Zoom and understanding the virtual component and knew the actual playbook on how to operate and run it, herself and her team were able to provide a lot of guidance during the event and were key players when it came to the virtual event, putting together the graphics and everything else that came with organizing the event virtually.



Adztech & Public Relations, Inc. from Left to Right: Christopher "Taco" Rowland, Paul Mendiola, Geraldine Leon Guerrero, President and GM, Jaceth "Ceth" Duenas, and Jason Davis.

model, as well as created a schedule that allowed her team to come back to the office at specific times when work needed to be done there. She also allowed for herself and her staff to use the time they had to go back and take more certifications during the height of the pandemic, when the local government placed strict stay at home

There were many challenges that her business has faced because of the pandemic, and as a woman owned small business owner and mother, she had to be creative and adapt to balancing both work and family life. Geri is a mother to a four year old son. The pandemic closed operations for many businesses and organizations island-wide,

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and because daycare/school was out, she had to think about how to shuffle through work with a four year old. Creating a "safe place" tent space for her son in the office was one of the ways she was able to manage getting work done and caring for her son at the same time. Another challenge she had faced was deciding how to handle making deliveries to her clients without too much personal interaction. By having a strict safety plan in place for her team when making deliveries, to include the offloading of the container, storing the items, and delivering it to her clients, she was able to mitigate any potential risks her employees would encounter. Employee safety was top of mind and ensuring that procedures were in place to follow were important.

The impacts of the pandemic not only had its physical challenges that businesses were faced with, but also financial challenges as well. Adztech & Public Relations, Inc. was able to take advantage and apply for the SBA COVID-19 relief options that were available for small business owners impacted by the pandemic. Geri was able to apply for both rounds of the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), and with the help of the Small Business Development Center to guide her on how to apply and understand the requirements, she was able to get almost \$50,000 for both rounds. Her company was also able to get full forgiveness for the first round of PPP. Geri did not want to take out any loans, and although the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) loan was introduced to her, she went with applying for the PPP instead because of the possibility that it can be forgiven, given she utilized the funds as how the program was intended. Geri also applied for several different grants that were offered and was able to get funding from grants as well. The business availed of the Guam Economic Development Authority (GEDA) Small Business grant and The Red Backpack Fund grant and was awarded both to help her small business navigate through these challenging times.

The Red Backpack Fund is an initiative started by The Spanx by Sara Blakeley Foundation. The foundation donated \$5 million to GlobalGiving to establish

The Red Backpack Fund. GlobalGiving will be making at least 1,000 grants of \$5,000 each to female entrepreneurs in the U.S. to help alleviate the immediate needs and support the long-term recovery of those impacted by this crisis. The Red Backpack Fund had over 70,000 applications, and Geri was the only applicant that was selected from our region. She was awarded on the first phase, where the foundation awarded 200 grants at \$5,000 each. The fund was intended to create a community of women to ensure they get back working and to provide support to woman owned businesses.

Geri learned about The Red Backpack Fund through another colleague who is a member of the Guam Women's Chamber of Commerce. Being a part of a business organization like the Guam

The logo for ADZTECH, with 'ADZ' in a bold, dark grey font and 'TECH' in a lighter, orange-brown font.

Women's Chamber of Commerce has opened up that door for extra opportunities that she wasn't necessarily aware of or had the time to go and research on her own. Being a part of a business organization has presented opportunities for her and she was able to learn about and apply for these opportunities that ultimately helped her small business.

Adapting to the new normal has been manageable for Adztech & Public Relations, Inc. Incorporating CDC guidelines and Department of Public Health & Social Services regulations regarding safety protocols like enforcing 6-foot distancing, hand sanitizing and wearing a face mask is something that the business has been practicing since the start of the pandemic. The company also takes temperature checks for all individuals entering the office, as well as has a visitor's log for contact tracing purposes. The company also invested in other sanitizing products like a spray gun and disinfectant cleaning products to ensure the ultimate safety within the office for both the employees and clients. In person meetings are limited, however if a client would like to meet in person, it is

scheduled depending on the need.

Geri's team is working harder than ever to ensure that business continues and her team continues to service the clients. The pandemic has forced many businesses and some of her clients to close down, and because of that, she has experienced some issues with the company's receivables. This has been one of the main struggles that they have tried to catch up on, but they also understand and have to be mindful and considerate because a lot of the businesses they would need to collect from are not in business anymore. She is working on setting up payment plans for her clients to help their situation, and is also doing in-kind work as well. Geri and her team are trying to find ways to help their clients as they try to get back on their feet and recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

Another way her company is adapting to the new normal is by finding creative ways to grow her client base. She felt this is the opportune time to expand her company, and some of the options they are consid-

ering is to help out our neighboring islands. The company is looking to start up some projects with the neighboring islands and provide outreach work with CNMI, but is also interested in expanding to the FSM (Chuuk, Pohnpei, Kosrae). Once they are done securing what they need with the Northern Mariana Islands, they plan to extend their services to the FSM.

"There is light at the end of the tunnel." Geri remains optimistic for the future of her company and for our economy, and as you can see, her small business was able to be creative and resilient and use the necessary resources that were available for her to pivot and overcome the COVID-19 impact on her business.

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