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peak performer

DIGITAL DIVA

By Sarah
Sekula

A former rocket scientist is setting pretty high standards for the digital media industry. And everyone is racing to catch up.



»» As president of Orlando-based Gen2Media, Mary Spio works alongside the likes of Justin Timberlake, Elton John, even Oprah Winfrey. Consider this: how often do you see an interview with the famed talk show host as the subject?

Almost never.

"Oprah's people are very particular about who video tapes her," explains 38-year-old Spio. However, Gen2Media's production crew was given the green light to capture Winfrey on camera for a recent Mary J. Blige documentary.

For most, it doesn't get much more satisfying than that. For Spio, wild success stories come as quickly as will.i.am can spit out rap lyrics. By the way, she's worked with the aforementioned Black Eyed Peas' rapper, too.

Likewise, it's no surprise that Gen2Media, her Internet-oriented video production and distribution company, is growing by leaps and bounds. In fact, more than 200 Web sites, including Coca-Cola and Microsoft Xbox, use her company's specialized online video platform to deliver custom video content.

At Spio's 22-person office, you could say she is the Alpha Geek, although she prefers DigiMaestro. Either way, her tech savvy is undoubtable.

Just take a look through her past for proof. In 1996, while studying electrical engineering at Syracuse University, she was also working as a deep space scientist for the Ultra Corporation designing satellite constellation and orbital mechanics.

Two years later at the Georgia Institute of Technology, she set her sights on otherworldly pursuits. As part of the SETI program (Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence), she was sending out probes into outer space in search of intelligent life forms.

As thrilling as all of that was, she says her work in creating Boeing Digital Cinema tops it all. At 29 years old, she engineered the technology to deliver movies digitally all over the globe. Hollywood blockbusters like *Star Wars: Episode II — Attack of the Clones*; *Ocean's 11*; *Planet of the Apes*; *Spy Kids* and *Monsters, Inc.* were all digitally delivered to big screens everywhere using Spio's technology.

Better yet, her ingenuity goes way beyond the techie world. As if serving as Boeing's head of satellite communications wasn't enough, she was simultaneously launching a matchmaking service, *One2OneLiving.com*.

The specialty media company provides a communications platform to singles. By 2004, the innovative site was really catching on. *One2One Living*, a successful, glossy magazine, was launched and partners, such as ABC's *The Bachelor*, were lining up.

Clearly, she has secured her spot at the front of the digital media revolution. In fact, she holds multiple patents in digital cinema and is the sole inventor on some of the methodologies and co-inventor on others. "It is mind blowing when you think of the magnitude and impact that something that started as an idea I was playing around with, is having on the industry," she says.

Few would disagree. Part of her astronomical success, simply put, is brain smarts and the other part is persistence. "I am not afraid of the word 'no.'" she says. "I'll find or make a way."

It's that undying can-do attitude that has propelled her light years beyond her job at 17 as a fry cook at McDonald's.

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With each new step in her career she continues to evolve.

With that said, Spio is ready to focus on her next project: spending a few hours with her production crew on the set of John Mayer's new video being taped at her Orlando studio. While her schedule can get super hectic, the jet-setter, trend-setter and all-around digital diva wouldn't have it any other way.

In fact, even on the rare evening when she finds precious free time, she is likely still on the move perfecting her hip-hop dance technique or belting out

a few tunes. On top of all that, she is putting the finishing touches on a non-fiction novel she penned over the past few years.

At the end of the day, if you think Spio can't possibly top what she's already done in her sterling career, you'd be wrong. In February, Spio, along with rapper Jay-Z, Olympic speed skater Shani Davie and Winfrey, was recognized by NBC News and TheGrio as one of the "100 History Makers in the Making."

In other words, who knows what she'll do next. x