Diversity in Technology: Challenge Brings Opportunity

EEOC Chair, Jenny R. Yang, recently weighed in on the challenge of building diversity in technology. "Making progress in expanding opportunity in the high-tech industry is critical to strengthening our economy and reducing inequality in our communities," she stated.

Leading tech firms have launched well-funded diversity initiatives in recent years, and yet women still account for only one third of the tech workforce. The percentage of black and Hispanic representation in the industry remains in the single digits. That lack of diversity increases in upper management.

"The challenge is real—so is the opportunity," states Gwen Houston, Microsoft Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer. "We have the opportunity to create enduring, long-lasting change that can impact more than just our own interests, but those of society as a whole. "

Benefits of Diversity in Technology

Despite the challenges, diversity is not simply the right thing to do. It also makes good business sense with tangible benefits, including:

- **Increased creativity** – Multiple studies have shown that diverse teams demonstrate greater innovation, more complete understanding of the market and increased ability to solve problems.

- **Improved financial performance** – Ethnically diverse companies out-perform homogenous companies by 35%

(McKinsey & Company). And, organizations with women in top management showed an increase of $42 million in value (2011 study by the University of Maryland and the University of Florida).

- **Wider talent pool** – USA Today reported that "top universities turn out black and Hispanic computer science and computer engineering graduates at twice the rate the leading technology companies hire them."

- **Improved connection with customer base** – According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2010, minorities made up nearly 28% the country's population. Women represented 50.9%, and studies show that women drive nearly 80% of consumer purchasing.

Multi-faceted Approach

There is no silver bullet. Building diversity and inclusion requires organizations to approach the opportunity from multiple angles.

- **More than just race and gender** – In addition to women and racial minorities, older employees, people with disabilities and people from varying cultures and religions bring a critical diversity of thought that inspires innovation.

- **Partnerships and acquisitions** – Diversity in technology extends beyond the hiring process. Organizations foster diversity and better serve their customers through partnering with minority-owned companies.

- **Upper level management** – Businesses see huge gains when executive circles include better representation by women and minorities.

- **Improve the pipeline** – STEM degree programs continue to graduate white and Asian men at much higher rates than women or ethnic minorities. Corporations play a large role in changing that reality through outreach programs in schools and communities.

Diversity and Small Business

While diversity in technology initiatives at companies like Microsoft make the news. All those same benefits in creativity and performance that strengthen large companies apply equally to small and mid-size businesses (SMBs).

Like many other successful organizations, eMazzanti has benefited from gender diversity in upper management from the very beginning. Co-founder and company president Jennifer Shine (now Jennifer Mazzanti) has contributed her technical and management expertise to guiding the company over the past 16 years.

Serving clients in varied industries on nearly every continent, eMazzanti employs a diverse workforce, from Eastern European immigrants at company headquarters to customer service representatives in Guatemala.

"We serve a global community, and that requires a global vision," says Jennifer Mazzanti. "The diversity in our workforce and partnerships fuels that vision, enabling us to provide powerful solutions for our customers."