

## Queen of the bank machine

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Wednesday, April 6, 2005



*Kyle MacDonald in New Zealand with bank officials.*

Just 29 at the time, Kyle MacDonald (BA'82) mortgaged her house, cashed in her RSP and borrowed \$50,000 from a business associate, all because she believed in an idea.

Recognizing a huge, untapped market in the self-service and banking industry, MacDonald launched her company, Phoenix Interactive Design, in 1987. Phoenix Interactive is the only Canadian company, and one of a handful worldwide, that creates terminal software for automated bank machines. Sitting just beneath the ATM screen and above the operating system, terminal software controls the whole banking process. It manages customer interaction, runs ATM hardware, and communicates with the bank's computer system to manage card/PIN security and the debiting and crediting of customer accounts. It sends alerts and error messages to a central monitoring system, and can be programmed to perform other functions. In short, terminal software is what makes ATM's tick.

And it has paid off for MacDonald. With that huge leap of faith, an unflinching drive and determination to succeed, and a combination of business savvy, relationship building skills and hard work, she has parlayed her initial investment into a multi-million dollar enterprise.

The little company that started 18 years ago with MacDonald and two employees now has more than 70 staff, an impressive roster of international clients, and it generates revenues "at the eight digit level." Her technology is being used in over 30,000 bank machines worldwide.

Peter McLay, one of the original team of three, still works at Phoenix. From the beginning, he says, MacDonald had a vision for the company, and was able to share it effectively. Although she was convinced that purchasing her software separately from

the banking hardware would greatly benefit the banks, she first had to convince them to try it. "Banks, by their very nature, are conservative and risk averse," says MacDonald. "But I'm sort of fearless. In the early days I did all the selling myself. I have a naturally gregarious personality, so that helped. I have a passion for what we do, and customers tell me that my enthusiasm is contagious."

Over the years, MacDonald has traveled millions of miles, and has developed solid client relationships worldwide with Bank of New Zealand, National Australia Bank Group, National Irish Bank, and Northern Bank, Clydesdale Bank and Yorkshire Bank in the U.K.

"Kyle is very customer focused, and that's always been a big part of our culture. She has a memory like you wouldn't believe. She keeps track of what is happening in the industry and is able to talk intelligently about things that are important to them," says McLay.

Her affinity for working hard and playing hard also affects the company's culture and staff relationships with clients. "We entertain our customers well, we have fun when we're onsite with them. Kyle has amazing working and personal relationships with people in the financial services all over the world."

McLay describes MacDonald as a high-energy person, and says, "she has maintained her enthusiasm, even during times when that was not an easy thing." MacDonald concedes that there have been some tough times, and "a couple of times I've come close to throwing in the towel, but I'm a tough old broad. You develop great coping skills to deal with disappointments." MacDonald has a hands-on management style. She is aware of what's happening in all parts of the company, and encourages a connectedness among staff. It's an important part of the corporate culture, says McLay. "Even though Phoenix has grown to be a mid-size company, it's like a large family business, and Kyle wants to ensure we keep those qualities."

In her personal life, MacDonald is married to another entrepreneurial spirit, John Franklin (MBA'71). His company, Nutech Brands, makes products that improve indoor air quality. Now that their two sons are grown, MacDonald and Franklin enjoy globetrotting together, and try to spend the colder months in warmer climates.

Franklin is proud of his wife's achievements, describing her as "a business person in the real sense."

"She has a great ability to absolutely be unrattled. She never loses her cool, at least never in the business world," he chuckles. "She has a huge energy level, and has worked more hours than most people can possibly imagine." And, he says, they have fun together. "We have one of those great relationships that don't come along very often."