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TECH VIEW

## Local entrepreneurs bring a resurgence of innovation

Shannon Pierce is a striking person. She's tall, blond, smart and entrepreneurial. A former attorney with Wilson Sonsini, a top Silicon Valley law firm, she's now at Goodwill Anderson Quinn & Stifel, where she is counsel in the areas of technology transactions and intellectual property. (She also serves as chairwoman of the intellectual property and technol-

ogy section of the Hawaii Bar Association). She brings valuable experience to our state — few local attorneys have worked in Silicon Valley.

Based on the new inventions and technology that come her way, Pierce sees a resurgence in homegrown startups.

"When I got here in 2007 from the Silicon Valley," Pierce said, "Hawaii was a

different place. We were headed into a recession, and no one was going anywhere fast. It's different now."

The recession may have been the best thing to happen to Hawaii in terms of laying the groundwork for the future of Hawaii's tech sector, she said.

The silver lining, according to Pierce, is that entrepreneurs who sat out the recession had no choice but to cogitate a bit and really plan their next moves.

"The upside of the downturn," she said, is that "entrepreneurs have come back strong, invigorated and full of well-thought-out ideas."

The companies she is working with epitomize this new breed of startup. They include Ikehū, a software company that provides incentives such as airline

miles to utility company customers; NoJuice, which owns [www.fightclub.com](http://www.fightclub.com), a fantasy sports site that allows you test your sports skills for cash prizes; and Vasper Systems, a high-tech exercise equipment manufacturer with applications for NASA.

SHANNON IS BULLISH on Hawaii, not only because of the clients that walk into her office, but because of what she sees as a member of the screening committee for the investment network Hawaii Angels.

Whereas she works with companies and inventors in the early stages, Greg Kim, a longtime Honolulu corporate and securities attorney (and founder of Virtual Law Partners), works with "older" startups that are

closer to commercialization.

Kim agrees that the startup "ecosystem" has improved greatly. He said he sees fewer deals than during the heyday of Act 221, but "they are better quality companies, which is an improvement from the past." Kim sees it as a matter of quality versus quantity.

So what's missing from the landscape to invigorate our tech sector?

Kim said Hawaii needs more "opportunists" — entrepreneurs in the mold of Steve Jobs. These tough, motivated leaders aren't necessarily inventors, but function as "ringleaders"

who can put a team together and move a company forward.

Kim is working with a couple of startups generated out of the University of Hawaii that show a lot of promise. They include KinetiCor, which has a technology designed to clarify MRI images for better diagnosis; and Protekai, a startup that commercializes patented biomedical technology research from UH's Angel Yanagihara.

Can Hawaii generate viable IP and couple it with ringleaders and opportunists?

Let's hope so.

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