



SHE'S THE BOSS

Marla Johnson | CEO/Co-founder
LeapXL, Little Rock

FROM EARLY FORAYS into broadcast technology and video game design to co-founding Arkansas's most successful ISP company, Aristotle, Marla Johnson has done a little bit of everything in the technology space. Her latest venture, LeapXL, seeks to change the game again.

"We are bringing no-code technology to financial institutions," she says. "Our technology allows you to connect easily to multiple data sources and then mesh it on a no-code application development platform into all kinds of dashboards, reports, workflow applications, and prototypes. It's very powerful, very fast, really fun, and easy to do. It takes about two hours of training and then you can basically build applications and launch them. It's super-cool."

LeapXL's product leverages what Johnson says is a primary trend in the technology industry, the move toward no-code products that can be run by anyone, regardless of technical background. "There are a lot of studies out there indicating that by 2024, over 60 percent of all new application development will be done on a low-code or no-code application development platform," she says. "We're still small. We are a startup, but we are well on our way to being a multimillion-dollar company on this technology."

Johnson's father sold mainframe computers, one of her brothers is a rocket scientist, and her mother was a teacher, so she grew up with an inquisitive mind and a comfort level about technology that few of her female peers had. Later, when she turned her career from broadcast journalism to tech, she was the only woman in the marketplace heading a technology company.

Nevertheless, she found pockets of support and ready mentors, something she credits to being located in Arkansas versus elsewhere. "I found people who were immensely helpful and supportive," she says. "In fact, I was just on the phone with somebody today who said, 'I want to help you because you're not a guy. I want to help you because you're a female CEO.' I found in Little Rock that there are a lot of women who want to help, and also men. I've been lucky enough to be surrounded by people who are technical who don't feel like they have to show that off."

As the new generation of technology continues to unfold, Johnson says people of all backgrounds wanting a tech career should consider Arkansas first.

"If you want to be that worker bee with your head down while you're developing and coding, and you want to do it for a giant company, you may want to go elsewhere," she says. "But the world will never be the same now that we have COVID; there are a whole lot of tech people working from home, from any location, so your location is a lot less important than it's ever been."

"Technology just means 'tool.' You develop technology tools people need in order to solve their problems, and that's incredibly broad. You may be shocked at the number of tech companies here in marketing technology, supply chain logistics, and any number of industries. You can find really great opportunities in Arkansas."

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