When Cynthia Ferguson left her high-profile position at a highly-successful Internet company, she pondered her future.

Luckily, the decade she spent helping to build the largest automotive classified web site in the country had its perks -- namely stock options, which afforded her the luxury of launching her own company.

She looked at buying a franchise, but deferred.

“When you look at entering into a franchise agreement, you’re handcuffed on what you can and can’t do because of compliance requirements,” she says.

“I wanted to create a company that would not be so narrowly defined on what we did.

“I wanted to put my own stamp on it.”

After months of deliberation, she made her choice: She decided to launch her own full-service media signage company. She named it Focal Point Signs & Imaging and established it in Costa Mesa, Calif.

Why a sign company?

“Signage is advertising and that’s where I spent the majority of my adult life,” she says. “Having worked in both print and web-based media, the creative aspect to marketing through messaging is attractive to me.”

She also discovered there was a huge gap in the marketplace.

“There are retail sign shops that cater to quick turnaround banners and the like, and then there are huge sign companies that cater to large developers and municipalities with quality design at the ready,” she says. “We wanted to provide the best of the best to corporations and small- to medium-sized business who normally wouldn’t receive the kind of consultative approach we take.”

Focal Point Signs & Imaging, a five-star rated Yelp company, specializes in what Ferguson calls “on-location branding,” which includes traditional signage, like a reception area lobby sign. Focal Point also addresses ways to communicate the client’s company vision, mission, and core values through digital imaging.

“We extend your company brand through actual signage throughout your office space and building,” Ferguson says. “We also consult on ways to communicate culture and create employee engagement through our large format digital printing capabilities.”

As Ferguson walks through a client’s office, she will say: “Let’s print your mission statement in vinyl lettering and place it in the conference room and outfit the individual offices with custom dry..."
vacy for conference rooms by placing -- at eye level -- a pattern or the company’s logo.

“What we can do through digital imaging and signage combined is powerful and almost limitless,” she says.

It’s rare for a signage company to have a consultative approach from a full-design standpoint.

“We’re a custom shop in the truest sense of the word,” Ferguson says. “Everything from A to Z is customized. For me, the idea of making customized signage to where it’s the only piece like it in the world is quite entertaining, creative and very rewarding.”

There are custom signage shops out there. The differentiator is what kind of quality are they producing? How eco-friendly are they? What kind of equipment are they using? How much time are they putting into projects? What kind of talent does the company possess? Do they offer serious consultative services?

This is where Focal Point excels and distinguishes itself from the competition.

Exhibit A is Ferguson. Exhibit B is Bob Gordon, her right-hand man.

With nearly four decades of experience – and a creative eye to match that knowledge – Gordon could not have stumbled into Ferguson’s life at a better time … or for his life, for that matter.

After being in management at a top real estate signage firm that folded under the crush of the 2008 economic crisis, Gordon worked as a consultant for several years. At 63, he was leaning toward retiring and helping his wife with her business.

Then he met Cynthia Ferguson. The two hit off and voila! – they now work side by side and have created one of the most sought-after signage companies in the area.

Gordon’s level of expertise, creativity and talent is clearly illustrated when Focal Point was working on a project for a new Garden Grove company called The Frozen Bar. Owner J.D. Pham, who jokingly claims he does not possess an inkling of creative ability, came to Focal Point with a colorless, flat logo. Gordon revamped it completely, making the letters looks like they’re actually frozen.

“It was a wonderful creative touch that blew me away,” Pham says. “Everybody comments now
about the logo. People actually stare at it and go ‘Wow. That’s cool.’”

Says Ferguson: “We needed a person like Bob to help us jump ahead of curve. We’re unique in that way. He brings that uniqueness, that quick turn-round and a large resume that a lot people in this industry don’t have unless they’re the President of the company. But even Presidents can’t do by themselves. You need a team – and we have a great one.”

Ferguson takes her business very seriously. When she tackles an assignment, she puts everything she has into it. Time has no meaning. Only perfection. Only making the client overwhelming happy and satisfied.

“We take a very detailed consultative approach,” she says. Very detailed.

“Cynthia is so meticulous,” says Sara Peary of Celebrate Forever in Newport Beach. “She was asking me questions about how we create company culture. She suggested that we re-create our office and conference room so it represents our company better, our region, and is motivational at the same time. I was speechless with her approach, style and detail.”

She walked around the office of another client, saying, “A mural of the history of the company would look great here.” And, “I’d like to see motivational quotes in the same lettering, theme and colors of the signage and logo to enhance employee engagement.”

Focal Point also designs employee recognition areas where employees’ names, pictures, titles and awards can be seamlessly switched out.

“As I said, we consult on every aspect of your signage,” she says.

This scenario says quite a bit about Ferguson, who had the foresight to start a hot, trending business, yet at the same time distinguish it from others by offering such quality and an eco-friendly approach. And she also had the savvy to bring in talent like Gordon and Juan Martinez, who handles design, fabrication and installation, a trifecta of skills rarely seen.

“I’ve spent 36 years in this industry – and at one time I was responsible for up to 35 employees,” Gordon says. “I can tell you flat out that Juan is near the top of the list. He is in the top three people I’ve worked with because of his diverse skills.”

Most signage shops do not do their own fabrication; they usually sub-contract it out. Focal Point’s talent – and its state-of-the-art equipment – enables it to do the fabrication and the installation.

“We’re involved in every step of a project,” Ferguson says, “so that means the quality we put out there is impeccable.”

Focal Point is also dedicated to protecting the environment by using inks that aren’t made with harmful chemicals and offer alternative media like fully recyclable Poster Paper and recyclable Vinyl (a much more eco-friendly alternative to PVC).

To further help reduce the ever-expanding carbon footprint, Focal Point participates in the HP Large-
format Media take-back program.
Focal Point is also involved many community events, such as the Annual City of Costa Mesa BBQ (which recognizes Police, Fire, and 911 operators), Costa Mesa Community Run, Women Helping Women (whw.org) and Celebrate Forever, a non-profit that focuses on strengthening marriages and relationships through education.

In the end, the success of Focal Point comes back to Ferguson and her adept decision-making skills.

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“Her professionalism and dedication is such that I just could not say no to this opportunity,” Gordon says. “I give her a tremendous amount of credit for having the forethought to create a business of this nature and caliber and with such integrity, values and principals.”

— By Rick Weinberg, California Business Journal

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