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(SEE DEAN'S LETTER)

## Change agent: *Yahoo!'s Elisa Steele '88*



**A**s chief marketing officer and executive vice president for Yahoo!, Elisa Steele '88 is one of the senior-most women in the Internet services industry. With a team of more than 500 employees around the globe, Steele is in charge of marketing strategy, brand marketing, public relations, and marketing operations for one of the biggest players in the international technology and Internet space. The pace is intense, and change often happens—quite literally—on a daily basis.

"You might hear people say they work in a dynamic industry," she says, "but there's nothing else quite like this."

Steele's position atop the technology industry is the product of hard work, talent, and a series of gut decisions that have paid enormous dividends—the first of which was her decision to attend UNH. After taking a campus tour as a high school junior, the Andover, Mass. native fell in love with UNH, and applied to the Whittemore School through the early decision program that existed at the time. Initially interested in hotel administration, classes in financial accounting,

statistics, and business law soon pulled her into the general business program.

"The professors had a passion for the topics they taught that was infectious," she recalls. "I was really into my classes because the people who taught them cared so much about what they were teaching."

Subsequent gut decisions took Steele straight from UNH to business school at San Francisco State University (SFSU) and then to an elite training program at AT&T that was the only job she applied for. "I didn't have a backup plan," she laughs.


AT&T led to sales and marketing roles with increasing responsibility at Sun Microsystems and NetApp, but Steele rejects the idea that her success reflects a climb up the proverbial corporate ladder.

"I find that to be a terrible metaphor, because as you get higher up a ladder, what happens?" she asks. "You get less stable and less connected to the ground beneath you." Steele instead likens her career progression as building a pyramid, beginning with a broad diverse base of roles that she has refined over time.

"If I have one piece of advice for students, it is to accept different roles, even if you know they're not what you ultimately want to do. Nothing has been more valuable to me than having taken horizontal roles in sales, marketing, and operations, because it has allowed me to really understand a company and its people from every perspective."

At the ripe age of 15, Yahoo! is "old" for an Internet company, but it is anything but a dinosaur. Steele says the next frontier is the personalized Internet, where the content presented to different users is targeted to their unique interests.

"There is a ton of content to be consumed, and the challenge is to offer each individual user the subset that is most relevant to him or her—and to the advertisers who want to reach that user," she explains. Meeting the challenge is part of Steele's mandate as chief marketing officer; a notion she meets with enthusiasm.

"Being CMO of Yahoo! was my dream job," she says. "I feel so lucky to do the work I do." 

—Kristin Duisberg