



AMS Founders Article - March 2024

Throughout history, mathematics and literature, the number three is said to represent wisdom, harmony and understanding. From Musketeers to Amigos, three is considered a perfect number. It's no wonder then that it was three young female founders with their combined experience and abilities who launched Association Management Solutions (AMS), the most successful association management company in Silicon Valley. Now, more than 25 years later, the company, and the founders, Kirsten Machi, Karen Moreland and Lisa Winkler have successfully navigated everything from the highs and lows of life in the valley to a global pandemic. With their signature determination and ability to adapt, AMS continues to thrive, expanding beyond association management to meeting and event management and technology software.

Like many Silicon Valley success stories, the AMS business plan was formed on the back of a napkin. Kirsten, Karen and Lisa known to clients and staff as "the partners" were relatively new colleagues, working for SoftBank as association managers. When SoftBank abruptly opted out of the association management business, the partners saw a unique opportunity and they quickly huddled to create a business plan. With encouragement from their SoftBank clients, AMS was launched in April 1997. More than two decades later, AMS manages a roster of leading global technology standards associations including the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), the Optical Internetworking Forum (OIF), and Streaming Video Technology Alliance among many others.

The focus on technology standards development and developing clients from the ground up set AMS apart from competitors. Offering strategic guidance to clients even before organizations are formed is a cornerstone of AMS's business practice. "When clients have big industry problems to solve, they know that AMS has the depth of experience and a long track record of success. We understand what it takes for clients to be successful and help bring together industry leaders and facilitate the process. Clients know they can trust us. That trust and experience forms the basis for a successful long-term partnership," says Lisa Winkler.

The natural outgrowth of launching and managing so many successful associations is providing the technology support through ARO (Association Resources Online), the AMS developed association management software. ARO is a robust, comprehensive tool that includes a document library; email list management; meeting registration, reporting and analytics; financial management and invoicing; membership records and calendaring. Association and event clients are able to customize ARO to their goals and requirements regardless of the size of the organization or event. AMS also offers ARO to their association clients and as a standalone product.



“ARO and the team behind it has helped us execute our strategy, simplify our internal reporting, and grow our membership foundation. The AMS support team is efficient and friendly. They are knowledgeable about our organization and they clearly have a desire to help the Forum succeed,” says Rhonda Heier, Director of Membership Development, Broadband Forum.

Behind the scenes, AMS boasts a dedicated team of association managers and Certified Meeting Professionals, many of whom joined AMS as a startup back in 1997. As female founders who were also young mothers when they started the company, the partners were leaders in offering remote work for managers and staff and providing work/life balance. The partners have always worked hard to make good business decisions, but also good human decisions, meaning decisions that put the AMS family first. This may be one of reasons why AMS enjoys a 97% employee retention rate of highly talented staff.

The flexible remote work model was long established when the world shut down for the COVID-19 pandemic. “Our ability to keep our team safe and continue to serve our clients as we all navigated that extremely difficult period is a proud moment for us as founders and as a company,” recalls Kirsten Machi. “We always try to continue improving, being innovative and creative about how we serve our clients and support our staff. We have an amazing team and during the shutdown, everyone rose to the occasion, being flexible and pivoting in order to meet the needs of our clients. I feel like this is a trademark of AMS and why we are so fortunate to have such a great reputation in the industry,” Kirsten Machi says proudly.

As the partners look ahead, now approaching nearly 30 years in business, what motivates them to keep going? “Our drive today is as strong as it was when we started AMS, if not more,” says Karen Moreland. “There are new challenges every day. And as our track record shows, we are at our best when we are working together to find solutions to those challenges.” She adds with a smile, “We’re a winning team.”

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