



Vickie J. Lewis

Learning a business inside and out has its advantages. Just ask Detroit entrepreneur Vickie J. Lewis, who heads VMX International, LLC, an environmental engineering and consulting company



that helps businesses dispose of waste, obtain ISO 14001 certification (an international environmental certification indicating that certain standards have been met for disposal and recycling of waste) and achieve waste reduction objectives. Ten years ago, Lewis was an account manager for a waste management firm and was committed to understanding all aspects of the industry. "I learned everything about the transportation and disposal of waste and I saw how the work that I was doing could really bring value to other companies," Lewis says. When she was downsized in 2000, this holistic learning approach helped

Lewis launch a business in waste management.

Drawing upon her retirement savings, Lewis opened VMX International in 2001, aligning herself with two partners, a chemist with a facilities management background and a former client, who provided additional financing. By working with larger waste companies to offer clients alternative methods of disposal and waste reduction strategies, such as wood, plastic and cardboard recycling, Lewis carved out a niche for her company. Detroit's Big Three auto manufacturers—General Motors, Ford Motor Company and DaimlerChrysler—are pivotal VMX clients, as are smaller firms and numerous minority-owned businesses.

With locations in downtown and suburban Detroit and an office in Houston, Texas, VMX has a staff of 22 employees and current revenue of \$1.2 million. Lewis projects a 15 percent increase in the coming year. "One of our goals is to acquire equipment that will allow us to self-perform some of the clean-up that we contract out," she says.