



“I believe if you go where your heart leads you, the money follows.”



Katrina Markoff

FOUNDER AND OWNER, VOSGES HAUT-CHOCOLAT

MAKING IT: Katrina Markoff was a student at the famed Paris culinary school Le Cordon Bleu when she was first "overcome by chocolate," she says. It was a dessert made with chocolate ganache at a restaurant near the Place de Vosges. Markoff borrowed the name of the location when she and a partner launched a gourmet chocolate company in 1998; soon her imaginative pairings, such as wasabi-laced chocolates, caught the attention of editors at *Food & Wine*, and the company was on its way. With revenues growing by 50 percent a year, Vosges became profitable in 2002, the same year Markoff bought out her partner and became the company's sole shareholder. She expects revenues for 2006 to surpass \$10 million.

FUNNY ABOUT MONEY: Markoff, 33, admits to being somewhat schizophrenic with her finances. "In my personal life, I spend everything I make," she says. "But with Vosges, I never take the profits. I never take a bonus at the end of the year."

KEEPING SECRETS: In 2003, Markoff decided it was time to open her own retail shop in New York City's SoHo neighborhood. But, worried that her accountant would blanch at the \$18,000-a-month rent (compared with the \$5,000 Vosges now pays on Michigan Avenue), Markoff didn't tell her. "You have to sell a lot of \$2 chocolates to pay for that," Markoff says. "When I did tell her, she said, 'Are you crazy?' But that store was profitable within a year and a half, and it is what launched the brand to another level. That's when a lot of the international business really started to happen for us."

ESCAPES: Markoff, who is married with no children, rarely takes a day off, but when she does she really gets away. Last summer she won second and third place honors in a Lexington, Kentucky, horse jumping competition (she stables her horse in Wauconda). And when Markoff, who has had her pilot's license since she was 19, needs some alone time, she revs up a Cessna 172 and takes it skyward.

PURSuing ALTERNATIVES: Markoff is turning in her Mercedes for a hybrid, a Prius.

HAVING MONEY: "It is stressful when you don't have money, but it is stressful when you do. You want to keep it, but not be ruled by it. I believe if you go where your heart leads you, the money follows."



Marcus Lemonis

CHAIRMAN, CEO, AND COFOUNDER, FREEDOMROADS LLC, LINCOLNSHIRE

MAKING IT: It wasn't just any family that adopted Marcus Lemonis from a Beirut orphanage when he was nine months old. His father and grandfather ran the largest Chevy dealerships in Miami and Tampa. After graduating from Marquette University, in Milwaukee, Lemonis returned to Florida and started selling cars at his grandfather's dealership. At 22, he made a failed run as a Democrat for an open state representative's seat in South Florida, then chose not to rejoin the family business. "I decided that if I wanted to be successful, I had to get beat up, learn from others rather than from my family," Lemonis says. He took a job at AutoNation, the country's largest car dealer, and worked his way up to regional manager. Then he took some advice from a family friend, Lee Iacocca (the former head of Chrysler Corporation), who told him the path to long-term success lay in finding an industry that was ripe for transformation. Lemonis sniffed opportunity in the fragmented recreational vehicle industry. At the time, most RV dealers were small independents who typically sold only one brand and offered poor customer service. Lemonis poured most of his limited savings into a business plan, inspired by the AutoNation model, for a national chain of RV dealers that sold and serviced multiple brands. His new company, FreedomRoads, began buying up independents and, in less than three years, has become the country's largest RV dealer, selling 18 brands and racking up more than \$1.5 billion in revenues last year.

SHARING THE WEALTH: Success allows (continued on page 114)