

DIGITAL DYNAMO

Annie Wang Celebrates
15 Years at GDC Technology

BY REBECCA PAHLE



➔ 2007 was quite the year for Annie Wang to start her first job in the cinema industry, as GDC Technology's newest senior sales executive. Theaters in North America were soon adopting digital projection technology en masse, and Wang was plunged into the thick of things, working with clients to smooth their transition to a whole new type of tech. For someone like Wang, interested in cinema and technology and with a fondness for building relationships—and a *lack* of fondness for doing the same thing every day—it was the right job at the right time. It served as a jumping-off point for a career that's since grown by leaps and bounds: Wang is now president of GDC Technology USA.

Upon joining GDC, Wang was technically new to the industry—she'd studied computer science at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia and for a few years had worked as a software developer. But in actuality, like so many others with family legacies in exhibition, she had been immersed in the world of cinema her whole life: Wang's father, now retired, spent his entire career in the industry, heading up film distribution and exhibition operations in Xinjiang province at the government-owned China Film Group. Wang grew up around movies and movie people, spending weekends at the cinema or in the screening room at her father's workplace, getting a sneak peek at the next big movie slated for release.

Work at GDC, then, was both brand new and familiar. Wang enjoyed the challenges of digital cinema (“I didn't really know what I was getting myself into, to be perfectly honest”), and a childhood spent observing her father and others conduct business meant she didn't find it daunting. “I know it sounds overwhelming when you're first getting into a brand-new industry,” she says, but it was the fast pace that kept—and keeps—her interested. “I like how challenging it is and how dynamic it is. I love that there is never a dull day. There are always new, innovative things you can learn.”

Wang spent her first six months at GDC's Hong Kong headquarters before transferring to their newly opened U.S. office in 2008, just in time to introduce GDC to a North American cinema industry hungry for digital technology. “It took a while for me and for my team”—a small one, at first, with just three people—“to learn the needs of the U.S. cinema market

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in order to build a business as successful as [the one in] Hong Kong. At the time, I remembered a famous Chinese proverb: *Sān rén xíng, bì yǒu wǒ shī*, which means, 'In a group of three people, there will always be one person I can learn from.' Right away, the three of us reached out to every dealer to introduce to the GDC brand and to start building relationships and set up a reseller network. That really helped us to take off." From there, sales grew exponentially—a combination of skills learned from GDC founder, chairman, and CEO Man-Nang Chong and contacts acquired from dealers, as well as "just plain good timing."

GDC gave Wang the opportunity to build a career on two things she enjoyed, cinema and technology, but it was a third element, the *people*, that would keep her at the company for almost 15 years, first as senior sales executive, then director of sales, V.P. of sales, EVP, and—since January 2022—president of GDC Technology USA. It's a "people business," she says, one in which she's spent time, energy, and heart building relationships with customers and colleagues. "It's fun to work in a positive company culture.

The entire team and I work hard to build relationships and solve any challenges. It's enjoyable work in a happy work environment."

The foundation of those relationships, Wang explains, is avoiding the hard sell. Your message to customers must be clear and convincing. "But a convincing message doesn't mean you really push what you want to sell. More importantly, you want to understand what your customer needs and be there to provide a solution. Help them, instead of trying to sell them something." This philosophy has helped GDC attain the second biggest market share in the domestic marketplace—30 percent, translating to roughly 13,000 screens—for digital servers in North America.

Starting in March 2020, Wang's customers have needed, for the most part, help maintaining their equipment, some of it purchased during the digital conversion boom and over a decade old. Now, three years later, Wang sees "the second wave of replacement getting started." AMC Theatres and Cinemark, for example, are both embarking on a sweeping transition to laser projection across their locations. GDC, meanwhile, has been developing new

products and honing existing ones, a lineup that now includes media servers, cinema software solutions, cinema storage, cinema audio, and a small-form projector that can be installed directly in the auditorium, without the need for a booth or a hush box. That ties in nicely with another GDC initiative, GoGoCinema, which builds on the minitheater and private rental concepts to allow moviegoers to program and schedule their own screenings. GDC's U.S. team has also expanded, with its initial group of three now including sales and marketing, technical support, customer service, production, purchasing, accounting, and logistics teams. As president of GDC Technology USA, Wang manages and organizes those teams into a cohesive whole. "[No] business can be successful only relying on one particular person," she says.

Fifteen years since Wang officially stepped onto the cinema stage, she says she has no thoughts of leaving the industry. For Wang, her time at GDC has not been just a job or a career. "It's like growing your favorite plant," she says. "You want to continue to water and fertilize it. After all, you've cared for it for 15 years and want it to grow and bloom every year." ■

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