



 **FRONTIER CENTRE**
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Profile Series

Profile of:

APRIL TINHORN

"In working with tribal communities, it's all about relationships."



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For Native American entrepreneur April Tinhorn, 43, working successfully in Indian Country is all about building and sustaining relationships with clients.

"In working with tribal communities, it's all about relationships. We are all about that and those relationships take time to build." the mixed Hualapai/Navajo/Chinese computer web developer and marketing consultant said in a recent phone interview. She certainly knows what she is talking about having nurtured many clients from many industries.



Tinhorn is the founder/owner of Tinhorn Consulting, LLC, a full-service integrated marketing and consulting firm specializing in telling clients' stories to the wider world. The firm's clients come from a great variety of businesses, including health care and wellness organizations, governments, education, and non-profit businesses. She also works with many tribal governments.

Tinhorn was born and raised on the Hualapai reservation located near the rim of the Grand Canyon in Arizona. Tinhorn Consulting LLC was founded on this reservation.

Growing up on the reservation, she said that her formative influence was her mother, a retired teacher and tribal politician. She was affected specifically by her mother's work and activism

within the community and she admired her mother's achievements, even though she was a single parent. As a very young girl, Tinhorn knew she should be getting off the reservation to see the rest of the world. A voracious reader, she wanted to see all the places she read about.

"I wanted to walk the Great Wall of China. I wanted to see all these places I had read about," she said, with a laugh.

Her life changed after being accepted into Arizona State University (ASU) on a full scholarship. She enrolled in a bachelor's program in computer science.

In university, she immediately received a sense of being Hualapai. She became more aware of Indigenous history and Indigenous issues when she dated a young man who was from a nearby tribe. She encountered some of the Native American controversies surrounding the celebration of Thanksgiving Day, for example.

Why should Hualapai people celebrate this day? She asks. "I never really thought about the context of these things until then," she said.

But, she described her time at ASU as a "great experience." She was only one of four female students in a course on computer science, and she was, as far as she knew, the only Native American in the computer science program. Her sense of identity only grew when she became involved with the American Indian Policy Institute, which she described as her "Rez on campus."

She said she did her homework and received mutual support at the Institute. "If it wasn't for the Institute, I am sure it would have been a different experi-

ence for me in college," she said. After graduating from ASU, she was under obligation to work for some time with the federal government. She accepted a job as a web programmer at the National Security Agency in Maryland. Her work took her overseas where she finally fulfilled her wish of travelling abroad and seeing the places that she had only read about in books. In fact, she worked for a time as a systems administrator in Frankfurt, Germany.

"I saw the Parthenon in Greece, the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City, and the Berlin Wall," she said, with excitement in her voice.

After completing her master's degree in computer science at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, she stayed in Maryland for some time. But, it was the terrorist attacks on 9/11 that convinced her that it was time for her to return home to her reservation to be with family.

After that experience, she was recruited by IBM-Arizona to work as a software engineer. After finally leaving the government, she worked for IBM in Tucson, Arizona. However, she felt it wasn't a good fit for her personality.

Her next job represented more of a turning point and a return to her Indigenous roots. A year later, she was hired by the Indian Health Service, the federal agency providing health services to federally-recognized Indian tribes. She worked as a webmaster and information technology (IT) specialist for the Phoenix, Arizona area.

"That was the first time I was working for and with Native Americans," she recalled.

At that time, she remembered an im-

portant lesson she learned as a child, "with gifts come responsibilities towards the community." So, she left the lucrative field of computer programming to work with her community.

Working with the Indian Health Service, Tinhorn wanted to go out to the clinics and hospitals and take photographs to update the website.

She worked with another Native American community during the nine months she was the deputy executive director for the Seminole Tribe of Florida's Native Learning Center.

From these experiences, she found the inspiration to start her own business. Established in September 2010, Tinhorn Consulting operates on the principle of creating websites for clients that need help with re-design, a testament Tinhorn said to having a "great strategic plan," a plan that she specializes in providing.



She said oftentimes that web developers tend to forget to ask clients some of the most basic questions, such as "who are you trying to reach?" "What are you trying to find?" And a more fundamental question: "Why do you want a website?" She said answering these questions forces a client to discover their own strategic plan.

In the way of obstacles and barriers she faced as a Native American entre-

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preneur, Tinhorn said she was unsure how difficult it would be for non-Native American entrepreneurs to develop their businesses, but she said she was taught how to deal with communities throughout Indian Country and she teaches others how to do it now.



In the end, she returned to the theme about how relationships work in the Indigenous world.

"If they don't know you, they won't do business with you," she stated plainly.

Tinhorn's business vision and acumen has certainly been recognized. She received recognition as a 2014 "40 under 40 Native American Award" recipient by the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development – a non-profit organization that works to advance Native American economic development.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Joseph Quesnel is a research fellow for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy who mainly focuses on Aboriginal matters and property rights. Presently based in eastern Nova Scotia, he is from north-eastern Ontario and has Métis ancestry from Quebec.

He graduated from McGill University in 2001, where he majored in political science and history. He specialized in Canadian and U.S. politics, with an emphasis on constitutional law. He also has a Master of Journalism degree from Carleton University, where he specialized in political reporting. His master's research project focused on reformist Indigenous thinkers in Canada.

He is currently studying theology at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax.

In the past while as a policy analyst, he was the lead researcher on the Frontier Centre's flagship Aboriginal Governance Index, which is measured perceptions of quality of governance and services on Prairie First Nations.

For over two years, he covered House standing committees as well as Senate committees. Quesnel's career in journalism includes several stints at community newspapers in Northern Ontario, including in Sudbury and Espanola. He also completed a radio broadcasting internship at CFRA 580 AM, a talk radio station in Ottawa, and the well-known Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC).

He is a past editor of C2C Journal, an online Canadian publication devoted to political commentary. He wrote a weekly column for the Winnipeg Sun and contributes to The Taxpayer, the flagship publication of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Quesnel's policy commentaries have appeared all over Canada, including the Globe and Mail, the National Post, the Financial Post, the Vancouver Sun, the Ottawa Citizen, the Montreal Gazette, the Calgary Herald, Winnipeg Free Press, among many other major papers. Over the years, he has been featured as a guest commentator on many radio and television news programs.