

Bev Bethge
Founder and Chief Creative Officer
Ologie LLC

With nearly 50 employees and annual revenue of \$8 million, Ologie is a branding agency focused on helping their clients define and communicate their voice. Bev Bethge, founder and chief creative officer, established the company as Bethge Design in 1987, and it evolved to become Ologie in 2006.

Bethge volunteers much of her time to pro-bono work for local nonprofits. She is an ambassador for the creative class of Columbus and has personally mentored, taught, encouraged, and employed hundreds of creative individuals within the community.

Being an artist is often considered an innate skill. Has your profession always been a clear path for you? Most people in professional design start off as artists in some capacity. I've always loved art. My parents were always incredibly supportive, and I remember my dad taking me to the art supply store when I was 10, and it felt like home to me. In high school, we had a really strong art program and I competed in the Governor's Art Show; my artwork was exhibited at the Rhodes Tower. That's a big deal for a high school student. I attended Columbus College of Art & Design and knew that I was on the right path. That path, for me, has always been clear: visualizing and verbalizing things to move people to action. **You started a design company nearly 25 years ago. What was that like in the beginning?** After school, I started my own business and worked out of the Jefferson Center for Learning and the Arts. (I rented three rooms for \$145 per month!) I started my own company, believe it or not, because I was too intimidated to go on job interviews. I worked alone in the beginning. The first five years were definitely a struggle. I did a lot of work for neighbors of mine in the center who worked at nonprofits here in the Columbus community, like BalletMet and Thurber House. My work started to get in front of their boards, and these board members were representatives of larger companies. They started to take notice. **What happened next?** I eventually moved into the space Ologie occupies today in downtown Columbus, and I changed the way I approached my work and the environment I worked within — everything became very visual. The office design had to represent the work we do in real life. I knew, though, that I had to bring on people who thought differently than I did in order to grow the company. I'm the creative thinker, but I needed help with strategy and operations. This became the three "parts" of Ologie: creative, strategy, and operations. It's worked well for me and my partners. **How has your industry changed?** It has changed a lot over the last 10 to 20 years. Art supplies have been replaced by technology. Everything has gone electronic, and technology and software continue to evolve every day. It's up to this entire firm to keep up with those changes. I'm constantly in planning mode, though, so these changes don't necessarily scare me. I'm always planning six months to a year in advance. **What have you learned about yourself as a leader?** My focus is very much on the work we do, here. I really don't have a deliberate leadership style. I am who I am. But I do try to lead by example, and I try to instill the "give-back" attitude to encourage my team to put their skills to use in the community. **How would others describe you?** Quietly getting things done. **What gives you energy and inspires you?** Deadlines and solving problems! I like that I work in an environment where great things happen every day. I like that I've been a part of creating this culture. I always try to inspire my staff to pay attention to what gives them energy and to be selfish about that energy. If something doesn't give me energy, I find a creative alternative to get it done. **What is something profound you've encountered along the way that you've learned from?** The first 12 years, I didn't have a child, and it was a struggle to grow the business. Then, I had my son. Within that last 12 years, the business has grown fourfold. I learned, after I had my son, to really make the most use of my time. I learned to delegate and empower people to help me when and where I could not approach a task or a challenge. I needed that something to "pull" my focus away from the business and allow me to learn to let go. It's been a very rewarding education. **What advice do you have for professional women?** Be oblivious to negativity and discrimination. You just have to plow through those things. Thinking about it gives way to angst and frustration. Focus on your talents and your passion and the rest will just fall into place naturally.

