



Tech chic

There's more behind the Screen Goddess IT Calendar than just gloss and glamour, writes Claire Doble.

Hedy Lamarr was a 1940s screen siren – brunette, ravishing, a talented actress ... and inventor of frequency hopping, which is used to this day to allow military planes to remotely control torpedoes they have dispatched.

Taking the dual roles of the movie goddess and inventor who changed the world for inspiration, ThoughtWare chief executive Sonja Bernhardt came up with the concept of a calendar showing Australian women in IT as glamorous movie stars.

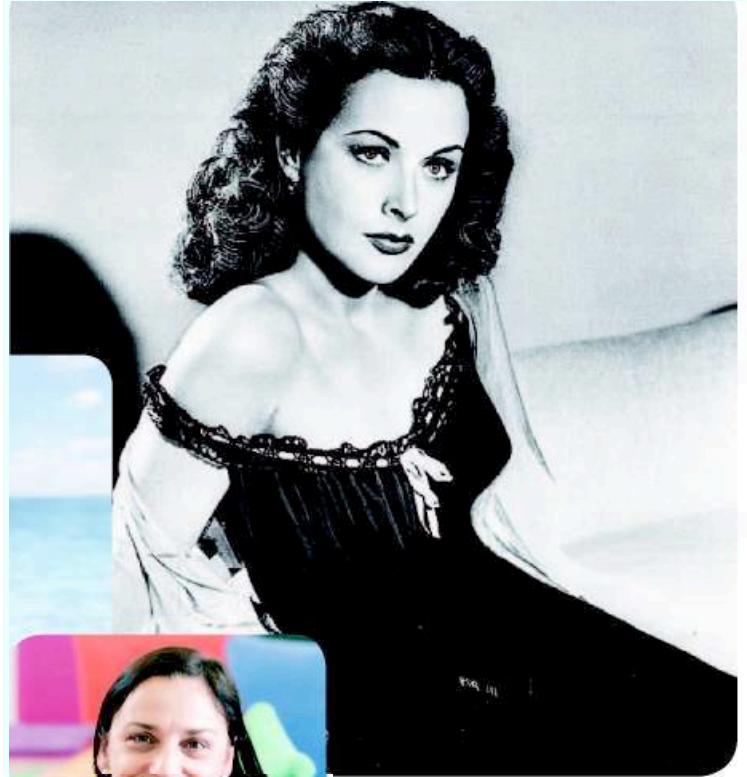
The message rings true, she reckons, because technology and science people are changing the world today and shaping tomorrow. "Like it or not, in our society, people regard film stars and socialites as role models," she says. "We wanted to show that [women doing IT] are worthy of our admiration, that they are also role models."

None of the models in the calendar, which has caused the usual controversy about the portrayal of women as sex objects, is posed as Lamarr; this is perhaps a shame, as the witty star had a pretty good understanding of media hype. It was she who famously said: "Any girl can be glamorous. All you have to do is stand still and look stupid."

Bernhardt has established projects bringing women together and promoting their involvement in the technology, science and communications industries for the past 10 years. For her, the calendar represents a chance to reap some much needed funding for her work and the efforts of others like her. "I've experienced first-hand the length of time and effort and amount of resources it takes to apply for government funding and I believe [the IT] industry should be funding itself," Bernhardt says.

She has been involved in groups such as AWISE (Australian Women in IT and Science Entity), WITT, (Women's Information Technology Transfer) and GIDGITS (Girls Into Doing Great IT Society) and other projects. She plainly feels this kind of grassroots advocacy gets the best results. "I don't really believe in government handouts, I believe in getting up and doing something about it," she says.

The calendar will be launched next month (www.itgoddess.info) and cost \$60,000 to produce, half of that picked up by various sponsors. Once costs are recouped, she says, the profits will go into funding programs such as sending role models into schools and universities to talk to and mentor female students Australia-wide. There is a particular focus on tours to regional areas, to reach



Role models ... (clockwise from above) Hedy Lamarr, Sonja Bernhardt and Sharon Don.

Photo: (below left) Adam Head

women who are often not exposed to other females in IT or technical roles.

"Wherever groups or individuals are actively encouraging young girls to take up science and technology, or women to take up careers, they can apply for funding from us to help them with this work," Bernhardt says.

One of the models, Sharon Don, manager of products and services for Personal Broadband Australia in Sydney, says her main motivation to appear in the calendar (as Ursula Andress from the James Bond film *Dr. No*) was the chance to "give something back" to the industry. "When I got into IT 10 years ago, there was no female role model to give me support," Don says. "I'd like to think that for the next generation, it's a little easier than it was for me."

She regards IT as a great industry to work in, and anything that encourages women to join, by dispelling the geeky, inaccessible image, is a good thing.