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Q&A With  
**Tiffany  
Schlain**

The Creator Of The  
Webby Awards Talks  
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## Back Door

### Q&A With Tiffany Shlain

**T**iffany Shlain could be called the First Lady of the Web. She might not be one of its architects, but she is definitely one of the medium's biggest supporters and ardent advocates. Shlain co-founded The Webby Awards (which is accepting entries as of Sept. 15 at [webbyawards.com](http://webbyawards.com)) at a time when broadband was still a twinkle in the eye of standards committees and AOL dominated online access. Filmmaker, activist, "Good Morning America" Internet expert, visionary, and more, Shlain has accomplished more in the tech world at age 34 than most will achieve in a lifetime.

**Q** Tell us about the first Webby Awards.

**SHLAIN:** I was planning it before the boom, but then the night it happened, it got international press and the boom was starting. It was like lines around the block to capacity, and it just struck some nerve at the right time. And we approached it with irreverence because I personally hate award shows. I should reframe that. I hate the painful acceptance speeches in the traditional award show model. So the first thing we instituted was the five-word acceptance speech rule. It's been one of my favorite parts of the annual show. We struck the right tone and had wonderful judges, and I think that was important.

**Q** Did the end of the tech bubble impact the Awards?

**SHLAIN:** After the crash, everyone was saying, oh, it was all hype. It was all a fad, smoke and mirrors. But we all know today that everything we were promising happened. Just the timeline was wrong. And the focus on just money was wrong because, as we can all see, it's just been an unbelievable communication tool. It's a political



tool, a media tool, a commerce tool. The Web has this great capacity, and I don't even think we've even seen the beginning of it.

**Q** How is it being one of the few standout women in the computer and Internet field?

**SHLAIN:** It's interesting. Women still are only penetrating like 13%, a very small percentage, of leadership positions in politics and companies. We're still every day in new terrain with balancing work and motherhood. I don't know why there aren't as many women in technology. My sister's an artist, and she uses the computer to do graphics. She said somebody introduced her at a party as, oh, she's really into computers. She said, 'I felt like that was like saying, oh, she's really into paintbrushes.' The computer, the Web, is a tool. I think the more that people actually really understand the Web as a tool, not like a thing unto itself, but as a tool to help you do

other things, you're going to see more women in this field.

**Q** Do you think that one reason for this inequality is that technology is presented to women differently than men in our society?

**SHLAIN:** That's a good way to ask it. I think that in schools, they make technology the thing instead of the tool. It's a hard thing to articulate. I'm actually thinking about writing a whole book on this subject, about making things happen, being a woman, being a leader in the 21st century, and using the Web to make those things happen. I wonder if that's like a right brain, left brain issue. I don't know. It's a great question, but I don't have the answer.

**Q** Do you think the Web has the potential to promote good information or disinformation any more or less than traditional media?

**SHLAIN:** People are going to need to develop a Web literacy. When video-editing technology became pervasive, people began to learn how manipulative cutting and editing or showing a shot a certain way could be. People are very image savvy now. In that same element, people need to become much more Web savvy. You still need to have the same kind of filter of morals and ethics and suspicion, skepticism, of where you're getting your information.

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