

Randy Wagner

Chief marketing officer ■
Orbitz Worldwide

Randy Wagner was a behavioral psychologist for six years before she became a marketing maven.

That training comes in handy at Chicago-based Orbitz Worldwide as it competes against rivals like Expedia Inc. and Travelocity.com L.P. for customers searching for flights, hotels and vacation packages.

"A lot of consumers can't articulate what they really want, and I can listen with that third ear," says Ms. Wagner, 55, who supervises 150 employees. "I never ask people what they want. I enlist people to help us perfect an idea. And that idea is based on observation."

Soon after she joined Orbitz in 2005, Ms. Wagner was sitting on a tarmac when she picked up a recorded message on her cell phone that Orbitz had sent to customers flying into New York, alerting them that flights were being delayed three hours because of thunderstorms.

The interest her fellow passengers showed in this news made her realize people wanted more control over their travel experience. It inspired her to more aggressively market the services Orbitz provides its customers in transit under the moniker Orbitz.TLC (which stands for tender loving care). She expanded it to include cell phone alerts of gate changes and help with hotel rebookings during delays. Orbitz.TLC also gives customers three-day weather forecasts for their destinations and links to city guides.

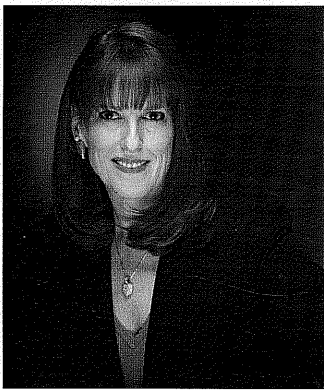
So far, so good: Bookings are up 30% over last year, and Orbitz is now the second-most popular site for booking domestic travel behind Expedia. Last year's revenue was \$10.1 billion, up 27% from 2005.

Now she has to keep that momentum going. For the past two years, her goal was to differentiate Orbitz from the "sea of sameness" in the online travel world. This year, "we're going to deepen the differences," she says, declining to talk about specific initiatives for fear of tipping off competitors.

But if anyone can find that edge, it's Ms. Wagner, says travel analyst Henry Hartevelt, because of her background working for Leo Burnett and later McDonald's Corp., where she was the vice-president of strategic global brand marketing.

"Randy doesn't come from the travel industry," says Mr. Hartevelt, of Forrester Research in San Francisco. "She brings a fresh perspective on how you stay relevant, like putting together processes that help to take some of the hassle out of traveling."

Samantha Stainburn



STEPHEN J. SERIO

► **WHY WE SHOULD WATCH HER:** With more airlines and hotels offering online booking and low prices, her success—or failure—in sniffing out extra services travelers want will determine whether Orbitz remains an industry leader.

► **CROSSROAD:** At 26, she was staff psychologist at the United Cerebral Palsy Assn. in Manhattan, making \$10,000 a year. When her rent went up 10%, her search for a more lucrative career led her to a job in marketing.

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TOP ANSWERS



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COCKTAILS (3)



GOLF (2)



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