

Travel Square One helped by bringing in old pros

BY DOUG MCPHERSON

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Typically in business, the word “flat” isn’t good. Flat revenue. Flat growth. Flat sales. Not good. But don’t tell that to Bill O’Connor.

He said working in a “flat” organization is causing him to have as much fun as he’s ever had in business. And the company’s growth and profits are anything but flat.

“It’s a culture of mutual respect, cooperation and shared expertise,” O’Connor said. “We actually have fun in a business in which many do not. In a sense, by re-inventing an older business model, we created something that fit us, rather than having to fit in. What a blast.”

O’Connor is referring to Travel Square One, which he and business partner Paula Wagner run. It delivers travel planning and fulfillment for leisure clients around the globe. O’Connor and Wagner teamed up in 2006 to re-invent the company by bringing in seasoned travel professionals who cooperatively own and operate the enterprise.

“Each travel consultant serves his or her own clientele personally and typically have had a long-term relationship based on strongly developed trust levels,” O’Connor said.

It’s tough to argue with the concept. Since the shift, the company’s annual revenue grew from \$327,700 to \$5,603,027 in just two years.

O’Connor said adding those pros and their loyal clientele caused the growth spike. “We carefully structured the company to afford unique opportunities for seasoned travel counselors in several im-



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Company: Altour/Travel Square One

Managing member:

Bill O’Connor

Location: Denver

Industry: Travel services

Website: www.travel-squareone.com

Phone: 303-989-9900

Employees: 20

Revenue growth: From \$327,700 to \$5,603,027, 1,610%

worked as independent contractors with other travel agencies weren’t eligible for employee-type benefits.

O’Connor admitted that without the equal ownership idea, Travel Square One’s place in the market would be ordinary at

portant ways,” he said.

The shared ownership idea, O’Connor said, gives the travel consultant a chance to share in the profits and asset growth of the company.

It also gives them a voice in the host agency’s key business decisions without the responsibility of operating the enterprise day-to-day, with all the incumbent business responsibilities that detract from focusing on the customer.

Plus, the consultants get benefits such as health care coverage and a 401(k). O’Connor said typically, counselors who



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Bill O’Connor, left, is founder and managing member at Travel Square One, and David Glanz is co-owner and travel counselor.

best. “Absent the equal ownership concept, we would be no different than any number of existing host agencies, and there would be little reason for a senior counselor to join us,” O’Connor said. “As a creator and owner of one of the first host agencies created in 1987, I refer to Travel Square One as version II.”

He also credits a business alliance with Altour, a large, international travel-management firm, for the company’s growth.

He added that it was the company’s original intent, with the reorganization, to grow as quickly as it did. And believe or not, Travel Square One actually expected its growth to be even faster.

O’Connor said the demography of Trav-

el Square One’s client base is skewed to a higher income and more expensive travel needs.

“The most severely impacted travel companies, both in distribution and supply, have been those who sell on a price basis, or low yield. The more expensive end of the travel market, while impacted, has held up better,” he said.

He added that as the economy recovers, and consumer and travel professionals’ confidence improves, he expects to return to the level of growth the company experienced in its first year and continue for about the next five years. ”

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