

How to succeed in (travel) business by really trying

STRONG TRAVEL SOARS PAST THE USUAL TRAVEL AGENCY – AS LIFESTYLE EDITORS

Meticulous service is the hallmark of Strong Travel, a family-owned luxury travel agency in Dallas.

Rather go to Cabo San Lucas, instead of the Bahamas – with one day’s notice? In the middle of Europe and need to get from Berlin to Naples?

Jim Strong and his family handle these requests daily with grace, style and efficiency.

“We care a great deal about the details. And we work hard to get everything just right,” Strong says. “The customized leisure travel itineraries we create for our clients are extensions of their personal tastes and preferences so we get to know them and what they like. We consider ourselves lifestyle editors, finding special places and experiences they’ll enjoy.”

MODEST START, WEALTH OF PERSONALITY

In 1975, Nancy Strong was nearly finished raising her family with her husband, Ace. She decided to go into business. Jim, the third of five Strong siblings, took a semester off from college in 1978 to help his mother. He continues today, as president.

Jim is easy-going, hospitable – instantly likable. At ease in his compact sixth-floor office that overlooks the leafy Highland Park neighborhood of Dallas, Jim is precise and professional in his speech and manner.

Jim describes his mother as “the original Twitter.” That comes from the low cost, entrepreneurial way she created buzz for her business in the tenuous first year of Strong Travel.



The downtown office building where she rented space banned direct sales solicitation of other tenants. So Nancy and a colleague began each day riding the elevators.

You’ve heard of the job seeker’s elevator pitch, a brief conversational summary of work qualifications. Well, from 8 to 9 a.m. Mondays through Fridays, there were Nancy and her pal pitching Strong Travel, up and down.

Nancy displays that same lively and gregarious drive today when she talks about her original business-building technique of 37 years ago. She laughs.

“Once the doors closed, we’d turn to each other and begin a conversation, so everyone riding would hear us: ‘Have you heard about that wonderful new travel agency, Strong Travel?’” Nancy says.

Such persistence and creativity paid off. Within a few months they gained several key accounts in the building.

Today, the Strongs have a healthy client list. They are leaders on many travel industry boards, and are recipients of numerous awards, including Travel + Leisure’s 2011 A-List of Top Travel Agents. Only 10 agents are named nationally.

Strong’s specialty is custom leisure travel. It’s 55 percent of the company’s business; the rest is corporate (30 percent) and group (15 percent) travel.



Jim Strong



Nancy Strong

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Jim Strong, Strong Travel

TRADITION OF SABRE TECHNOLOGY

Early on, Strong recognized the value of technology.

“In 1979 we put in one of the first Sabre systems,” Jim says. “It was this huge box that covered my entire desk.” Strong Travel has been 100 percent Sabre ever since.

“From booking to accounting, we depend on Sabre to power our business seamlessly so we can focus on serving the client,” Jim says. “I feel lost if I’m talking to a client and I don’t have a Sabre screen in front of me.”

Jim’s early experience with Sabre also helped him be more open to new technology as internet bookings grew.

“When internet use got big in the late 1990s, we embraced it as a productivity tool,” Jim said. “There’s a lot of information available. But you still need someone with experience and knowledge to make it useful. People want to know their best options. And that’s where we come in.”

The Strongs go to great lengths to delight their clientele, which includes CEO’s, professional athletes, and celebrities from Dallas and across North America.

On several occasions, the Strongs and their staff have personally flown overseas to hand deliver or retrieve forgotten items. And their custom-designed Mercedes-Benz courtesy van, replete with leather captain’s chairs and burl wood, whisks Dallas clients to the airport, gratis, as tokens of appreciation for their business.

Strong Travel Courtesy Van >

PRODUCTION AND GROWTH-FOCUSED

In addition to leading Strong Travel, Jim and Nancy still interact with clients daily, spending the majority of their time arranging travel. So, there’s no time for tech outages or lengthy support calls.

“What I get from Sabre is good response,” Jim says. “If I have a question or issue, they deal with it quickly for us.”

Jim is optimistic about the future. He sees hotels and high-end group travel as two strong growth areas.

“I’m a hotel guy. And there is simply an explosion of hotel construction,” Jim says. “A few decades ago, world capitals like New York, Rome, and Paris each had just a few luxury hotel properties. Now, each of those cities has dozens of options.”

High-end group incentive trip travel is another segment the Strongs are developing for future growth.

“With new hotel properties and travel opportunities throughout the world,” says Jim, “it’s great to have easy access to these through our partnership with Sabre.”

STAYING AHEAD

1. STRONG TRAVEL DELIVERS LUXURY AND LIFESTYLE AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS.
2. OVER 35 YEARS IN THE BUSINESS – WATCHING MANY SOLUTIONS COME AND GO.
3. SABRE CLIENT SINCE 1979.

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