

Company moves beyond 'order-taking'

Redefining its role kept Campbell Travel from floundering after 9/11

By **JEFF BOUNDS**
Staff Writer

NORTH DALLAS — When the twin towers of the World Trade Center collapsed on 9/11, they took down more than just bricks and steel and mortar. The reverberations were felt in travel agencies across America.

The shutdown of the airline industry took a two-by-four to a business-travel industry already reeling from a nasty economic downturn. Corporate-oriented travel agencies had been watching their business dwindle for some time as businesses went straight to the Internet to book trips.

To survive, Dallas-based Campbell Travel decided to fight fire with fire.

Working with the Dallas office of an Atlanta supplier of transaction-processing services, TRX, Campbell Travel found ways to automate many behind-the-scenes tasks that its agents had once done manually.

For instance, after making a reservation, Campbell now sends an e-mail to the client with an itinerary and information on weather, seat assignments and the like. Work like that at one time had to be handled by a human being. Bob Campbell, the chairman, says his agents can now handle twice as many reservations as they could before.

"We've cut our prices in half," adds Campbell,

whose brother Bill is the agency's president and chief executive.

Campbell also uses a type of search engine available only to the travel industry called RESX that can check prices on more than 100 travel-related Web sites, such as Travelocity and Expedia. The technology not only books

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the flights, but also compiles reports for corporate clients on their employees' travel and helps them control expenses and other factors.

Sales of the Dallas holding company of which Campbell Travel makes up the biggest portion, Campbell Resources, will clock about \$50 million this year. While that's a little above what was coming in prior to 9/11, it's an

achievement in a time when many travel agencies have been folding.

Travel agents say they have been forced to change the roles they serve to corporate clients. Five or six years ago, ARTA Travel of Plano, which competes with Campbell, booked flights and handled other basic logistics, since clients didn't have ready access to information like flight schedules and prices.

Today it acts more as a consultant, observing how clients spend money and making suggestions on how to save time and money, such as by negotiating package-flight deals for frequent air routes that travelers may take.

"We used to be order takers. Now we sell intelligence," says Stephen McSwain, executive vice president of ARTA Travel.

Contact DBJ writer Jeff Bounds at jbounds@bizjournals.com or (214) 706-7122.

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM: Brothers Bill Campbell, left, president and chief executive of Campbell Travel, and Robert Campbell, chairman, didn't cave when the Internet and 9/11 threatened to kill their business.

Campbell Travel

Business:

Travel agency
Address: 14800
Landmark Blvd.,
Suite 600
Dallas 75254

Top executives: Bob Campbell, chairman, and Bill Campbell, president and chief executive

Revenue: More than \$45 million

Employees: More than 65

Ownership: Unit of a holding company, Campbell Resources

Other locations:

None

Phone:

(972) 716-2500

Web: www.campbelltravel.com



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