



A YEAR AT FULL SPEED

Jeremy Mariette shares his formula for rapid success

Jeremy Mariette had been in research and development in the medical device industry, but discovered he didn't like the corporate life. So he went back to school, earning his MBA at the University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management, and went into the travel business a year ago. By next year, he expects his agency, Amphibia Travel, to generate about \$400,000 in sales.



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Mariette has created a business model that lets him work for himself while taking some time to play Mr. Mom—he and his wife, Stacie, have a 21-month-old son.

He started out by selling travel to friends and relatives and getting referrals from them, using social media to spread the word. He has a Facebook page that talks about his new business and where he also uploads photos and posts from fam trips (he's been on four in the past year). The page directs potential customers to his website, www.Amphibiatravel.com.

His website focuses on the ser-

vice that travel agents offer and the experience of travel rather than on price and product. His point: You can spend hours finding the best price, but travel agents have the best prices at their fingertips and the ability to add value.

And Mariette has invested time in training and travel to make sure that value is exactly what he has to offer his clients. He took the training that his host agency, Travel Quest, has to offer its member agents. And he takes advantage of the training that suppliers and destinations have to offer.

In addition, his fam trips to date, two to the Riviera Maya (a popular destination for Minnesotans), one to Fiji and one to Jamaica, have given him on-the-ground destination knowledge. That first-hand experience is coupled with his own knowledge gained while traveling with his wife over the past seven years. Those vacations have often been "big" trips to places like the Caribbean, Mexico and Hawaii, but also shorter domestic trips to destinations like New Orleans, Las Vegas and San Francisco.

Mariette's business is growing, mainly by word of mouth. He's now getting referrals that are four layers deep—friends who recommended him to friends, who recommended him to their friends and so on. He's still casting a wide net when it comes to what he sells, but Mariette intends to analyze his sales to determine what destinations and niches are most profitable, as well as which clients are most profitable. He'll use those findings to hone in on his specialties. Mariette has learned five essential lessons, both on his own and from mentors.

1. Educate both clients and the public about the benefits of using a travel agent. This is one of the goals of his website.

2. You have to be fast. "I think

many agents, new and old, don't realize the importance of quick response time, he says. Mariette points out that when consumers are planning and booking travel online, the response is immediate. He recommends getting back to clients immediately—even if it's just to say you'll get back to them later or to refer them to another agent who specializes in what they're looking for.

3. Because your clients expect speed, your suppliers have to be fast, too. "It's important to find suppliers who are quick to respond as well as being very knowledgeable," says Mariette. "Having good contacts can make putting together a trip much easier than trying to do it yourself," he says. "It's impossible to keep up with everything going on—especially if it's an area out of your main focus—but a good supplier can be very valuable in making sure a client has a perfect vacation."

4. Ask for help. "Suppliers, host agencies and other agents are all great resources and are more than willing to help," he says.

5. Everyone is a potential customer. "People love talking about their travels and dream trips, and that makes for a great opening to hand out a business card," he says.

Mariette has a home office but often works from a coffee shop, simply because he feeds off the energy he gets from being around people. He's a natural entrepreneur, and having that hard-wired into him in addition to his own passion for travel means he's never short on motivation.

There are definite ups and downs in his work flow, but so far that works well for him. Summer is a little slower, giving him more time with his son. But as summer has started to wind down, he's finding that business is picking up; he's already booking winter travel. @