

Meet Ernst & Young's Entrepreneur of the Year Contenders

These 38 Dallas innovators are building more than just their companies.

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WorldVentures

[Mike Azcue \(right\)](#)

CEO

WorldVentures

[Wayne Nugent \(left\)](#)

Chief Visionary Officer

Mike Azcue had already made a fortune in direct sales when he decided to start his own company in 1999. “That was a real, real struggle,” he says with emphasis. “I told myself that I would never do that again.”

Luckily for him, he failed to take his own advice. Azcue and his partner, Wayne Nugent, were top salespeople for a travel company when Nugent shared his idea for a travel company that would harness the power of the Internet with a direct sales approach. Soon enough, WorldVentures debuted on the web, selling discount travel packages to members who were sold on the deal by an independent direct sales rep.

In 2006, its first year of operation, WorldVentures grossed \$15 million in revenue. By 2009, that number had swelled to \$90 million.

With more than 60,000 people now selling WorldVentures memberships, Azcue believes that his company is positioned to become the “Mary Kay of travel.”

“Most people in direct sales love the fact that the more successful you can make other people, the more successful you become,” Azcue says. “I don’t ever see myself leaving WorldVentures. I love what we’re building, and I’m having a blast.”

“Mike and I are like the dynamic duo,” adds Nugent. “I like to think and dream it up, and he likes to get it done. If I was bogged down in everyday detail, we wouldn’t be where we are today.”

As the Plano-based company’s chief visionary officer, Nugent describes his daily routine as walking into employees’ offices, finding out their priorities, and scribbling directions on their omnipresent whiteboards about “what’s coming next.” He sees himself as the one who helps the parts come together so that WorldVentures can become “the largest travel company in the world, but not at the expense of being the best.”

It’s not hard to grasp Nugent’s vision for the company when he lists his role models: Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, Richard Branson. He wants nothing short of making a direct sales company a “cool” and lasting brand.

“Who controls the end user in the travel industry?” he asks rhetorically. “It’s friends and family. We have built our model around that. There’s nothing else out there to compare it to.” —*J.D.J.*