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People in Business

UP CLOSE / SIMMS JENKINS, founder & CEO, BrightWave Marketing

Sold on the power of e-mail

By **CAROLINE WILBERT**
For the Journal-Constitution

Simms Jenkins worked at several tech startups, including Zebmart.com, during the tech boom in the late 1990s. He was in his twenties and, like a lot of dot-commers at that time, figured he'd retire by 40.

Of course that didn't happen. However, the tech bust did not destroy Jenkins' faith in Internet businesses. Instead, five years ago, at a time when he says "the Internet had lost a lot of glamour," he launched an e-mail marketing company. He self-funded it and turned a profit the first quarter.



SEAN DRAKES / Special

THE SIMMS JENKINS FILE

- **Residence:** Buckhead
- **Age:** 34
- **Family:** Wife, Kelly; sons, Sam (3) and Cal (1)
- **Education:** Denison University
- **Favorite movie:** "The Godfather"
- **Last book read:** "The Devil in the White City" by Erik Larson.
- **Favorite quote:** Jenkins family motto: "Perge sed Cauter," which translates as "Proceed, but with caution."

"Companies spent \$500 million on e-mail marketing last year, which generated almost \$22 billion in sales," said **Simms Jenkins**, who has thrived in the field.

From his days working at tech startups, he knew a lot about what not to do, such as don't lease 20,000 square feet of high-end office space before you need it and don't raise a bunch of venture capital just for the sake of it.

His company, BrightWave Marketing, has grown steadily. He has nearly doubled revenue each year and has worked with clients such as Lowe's and Ted's Montana Grill. Jenkins is finishing up a book called "The Truth About E-mail Marketing," which Pearson is publishing this summer.

Q: Why did you decide to start BrightWave?

A: I started the company a little over five years ago. Prior to that, I ran the

customer relationship group at Cox Interactive Media. I realized that there were a lot of companies of all sizes and budgets who needed help setting up and managing e-mail marketing programs to communicate to their customers and prospects effectively. There weren't a lot of firms out there. There were a lot of tools and software but not a lot of firms that you could partner with to make sure you were doing it in the right fashion and doing it so you could get the best response and the best return on your investment.

Q: So if you were a big company, you had your own in-house person, but for a small company, there was nobody to outsource this to?

A: Even the big companies don't necessarily have large teams that focus on this. A lot of companies don't have expertise. They have more generalists who do a lot of interactive marketing, but e-mail marketing changes so drastically and frequently you really have to stay up to speed on things that can impact your success. Much like a lot of companies outsource their accounting or legal, people are moving toward outsourcing their e-mail and search programs. They need firms that are experts and do nothing but focus on that. That is why we made the distinct decision to be an e-mail marketing services firm rather than a firm that also builds Web sites.

Q: What is the market like right now for e-mail marketing?

A: Companies spent \$500 million on e-mail marketing last year, which generated almost \$22 billion in sales. Most marketers are spending more on e-mail each year as they realize it is one of the most measurable and certainly one of the most cost-effective ways to communicate with their customers. As the recession looms, people are trying to figure out the best way to stretch their marketing dollars. E-mail has been a big recipient of that.

Q: Can you talk specifically about what you do for a client?

A: At a high level, we design, send and track e-mails for customers that go to their own customers and interested parties who have given specific permission to

receive their e-mails. An example would be Ted's Montana Grill, which is based here and is a growing national restaurant chain. We manage all their e-mail marketing programs. A lot of our clients use the Internet to sell directly, but Ted's is a great example of how e-mail marketing works when it is a traditional business. We use e-mail to build the relationship with Ted's, and to build loyalty, as well as to drive traffic to their stores. We send reminders for birthdays and anniversaries to put Ted's top of mind. We send newsletters and relevant e-mails so that hopefully when people are thinking about where they are going to go to dinner over the weekend, Ted's will be top of mind. It is not an immediate transactional type of e-mail. It is a strong branding tool. All these people have given permission and opted in to receive e-mails from Ted's. So it is a really powerful marketing channel, given that with a lot of other marketing, you are lucky if two percent of your audience is interested in what you are saying, whereas with e-mail, everyone has given you permission, which means they are all interested in your products and services.

Q: What can you track in an e-mail marketing campaign?

A: We can track everything. ... We can track how many people clicked, how many people opened, how many people forwarded. Those metrics can be really powerful.

Q: Tell me about your book and why you decided to write it.

A: I have been writing columns for various online publications ever since I started five years ago. I started to get our company's name out there. E-mail marketing is a pretty young industry. There is a lot of noise out there, and this is one way we can assert ourselves and show that we are experts. Because I have been a pretty prolific writer, Pearson, the large publishing company, came to me and said they were interested in a book about e-mail marketing for their "Truth about" series. I had been exploring a book idea too, but it hadn't gotten as far as I wanted, just because of time. Pearson was able to provide structure and guide me through this process. I am wrapping it up now, and it should be published late this summer. I think it will be a great book for people who are managing e-mail marketing programs for their companies, or are maybe exploring that for the future. It should help people navigate the often tricky waters of e-mail marketing.

Q: What has the process of writing a book been like?

A: I have enjoyed it. I will be a lot happier and more relaxed when it is completed, to be honest. People told me, "This is going to be a lot more work than you think," and it has been. But it has been an educational process, and I look forward to seeing the finished product and seeing people's reactions. I think it will be a great tool for marketing our company and bringing us up to a higher level.