

ITA flies high among Bay State software cos.

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CAMBRIDGE — **ITA Software Inc.**, which makes the software used by Orbitz and many other travel Web sites to track down cheap airfares, is rapidly becoming one of the Bay State's largest software companies.

The Cambridge company now has 390 employees, up from 142 at the end of 2005. And ITA plans to hire another 70 people by year-end. Nearly all the employees work in Massachusetts.

"We're in an industry where our customers have pretty big needs and we're trying to step up to meet them," says CEO and co-founder **Jeremy Wertheimer** about the growth. Then he added: "It's fun to walk into the lunchroom and see 400 people."

The explosive growth underscores ITA's success in finding a profitable niche — helping airlines and travelers sort through a maze of complex routing and pricing data to find the best fares and tickets.

ITA already helps power a number of travel Web sites, including both general sites like Orbitz and **Kayak**, as well as those run by specific airlines, including **Alaska Airlines**, **Continental Airlines**, **US Airways** and **Hawaiian Airlines**. The privately held company says revenue rose 41 percent last year to \$52 million.

"They have seen steady upward growth because they take something that is extremely complicated and make it easy to do for the user," said **Forrester Research** analyst **Henry Harteveltdt**. He says ITA has also excelled by taking a fresh approach to the problem and understanding that airlines have to sell their seats like retailers.

Now ITA is building a new system to help airline employees make reservations for

tional airline reservations systems run by **Sabre Holdings**, **Amadeus IT Group**, **Worldspan** and **Galileo International**. The companies are already competing in the online travel space: **Worldspan**, for instance, powers **Expedia.com**. ITA hopes to launch its new reservation system next year.

Going forward, Harteveltdt said, ITA has plenty of growth potential because it has only tapped a small portion of a large industry. But he said the company is also vulnerable to industry downturns, because its business is so focused on airline tickets, while some other travel companies also handle hotels, cruise lines and other products.

Meanwhile, ITA has become well known in Boston circles for its help wanted posters on Boston subway trains featuring tricky math problems and puzzles.

One ad asks: "If the integers from 1 to 999,999,999 are written as words, and concatenated, what is the 51 billionth letter?"

"They have to complete the puzzle in order to get an interview," said **Cara Kretz**, ITA's vice president of marketing.

Kretz said the problems have become so popular that the company sometimes gets responses from people who want to check their answers, but have no interest in actually working at the firm. The company is currently advertising more than 30 openings, mainly for engineering, customer relations and quality assurance.

Despite the growth, ITA says it is not searching for more space. ITA currently occupies five floors at 141 Portland St. in the Kendall Square neighborhood.

ITA, founded by three computer scientists from the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology** in the mid-'90s, was originally named **Internet Travel Agent Inc.**, but changed its name in 1999.

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Page 19

PLEASE SEE ITA, PAGE 21

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