

# INTERNET WEEK

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**T**rying to find unique uses of Internet technology these days can be tricky. Once a newcomer demonstrates even an ounce of success, others crowd the niche faster than you can say IPO. • We reveal the exceptions on the following pages. These largely undiscovered hotshots all satisfy two key requirements: They all solve an important business problem using Web automa-



tion; and they emphasize a wholly new e-business model. • In some cases, such as Technicolor and DiscoverMusic.com, they're offshoots of pre-Internet firms. Other companies, such as eCoverage, Starbelly.com and WarrantyNet.com, have established e-marketplaces to improve brick-and-mortar processes. And all of them suggest that even megamergers can't slow down the Internet entrepreneur.

## ITA SELECTS THE PERFECT FLIGHT



**J**EREMY WERTHEIMER, ITA SOFTWARE CO-FOUNDER, started the project that led to his current business by pondering—while putting off work on his computer science thesis—how a computer program might help a traveler pick the optimal air-

line flight. "It's a huge, tough computer science problem," Wertheimer says. "You assemble what would be the ideal trip out of parts lying around, like individual flights. There are hundreds of thousands of flights every day and hundreds of millions of airline fares. How do you pick the best one?"

Eight years later, Wertheimer's idea materialized as a small company with a search engine in open beta at [www.itaoftware.com](http://www.itaoftware.com). Unlike competitors Travelocity and Microsoft Expedia, the ITA site offers buyers a breadth of parameters around which to choose their flights: preferred arrival or departure time; windows of two hours to two days on departure and arrival times; and comparisons of flights originating at airports from 25 to 100 miles away.

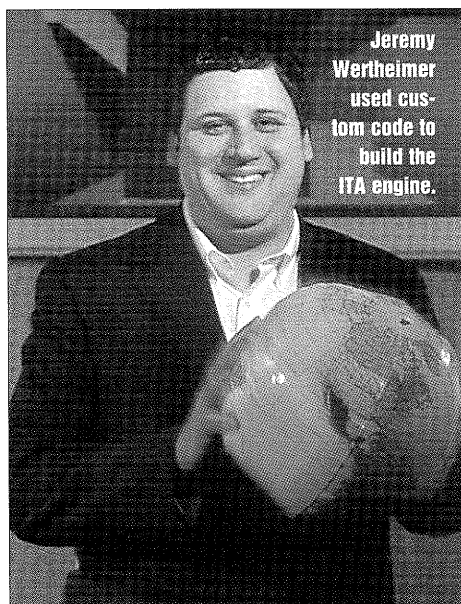
"It's displaying fares, times and availability all under one umbrella, which isn't currently being done to this extent," says Krista Pappas, an analyst with Gnome Advisors. To achieve high speed and

### ITA SOFTWARE

- **FOUNDED:** 1994
- **EMPLOYEES:** 10
- **REVENUE:** N/A
- **FUNDING:** Private
- **DISTINCTION:** Makes a powerful search engine to help travelers find the cheapest and most convenient flight; service available through an open beta program at [www.itaoftware.com](http://www.itaoftware.com).

highly flexible searches, the company uses almost no off-the-shelf software. Packaged databases were too slow. Instead, the company wrote its own database, which resides in memory rather than on disk for speed, in Lisp, C++, Java and Perl. A complex collection of search algorithms finds the right data. Analyst Pappas says the company will achieve financial success by offering its service on a private-label basis to airlines, travel agents and other companies establishing online travel businesses. ■

—Mitch Wagner



Jeremy Wertheimer used custom code to build the ITA engine.