

044 | BOUND *Feature* | Profile |

## Two and a half years after launching lesbian eco-travel brand Sweet, Shannon Wentworth reflects.

### *Is Sweet where you thought it would be?*

We thought we'd be growing every year and actually we're shrinking a little to fit our guest budget and where the rest of the world is, but by all other measures we're an extraordinary success: our mailing list is growing by leaps and bounds, we've had amazing success in the media, we've had tremendous success with our projects, the substance of our business is more than we ever dreamed of, especially the people we've met, the Sweeties — they've really taken this ball and are rolling with it. The ripple effect from the small acts Sweet has started is just tremendous.

### *Your role is CEO and founding partner.*

I wear a lot of hats because we're a small company — but they're all really cute hats.

### *What's it been like to be you the last couple of years?*

It's been a study in contrasts because I'm either working 22 hours in my pyjamas or I'm in a ball gown at a fancy gala. I often think, as I'm shuffling around in my slippers at home, people don't know how glamorous my life is. I love what I do, it doesn't feel like work. I'm in a really fortunate position to be able to run around and do what I love. Every once in a while I get to sleep in....

### *How big is Sweet's lesbian travel market?*

The small pool of lesbians are lesbians who are out and actively seeking community. There is a larger pool of lesbians in the United States, anywhere from 2.5 to 10 million and I don't feel we've really scratched the surface with them and I think part of it is that they live mainstream lives and don't necessarily see the need for something exclusively lesbian. Communicating that value is important.

### *What part of Sweet are you most proud of?*

I'm most proud of the community service projects.

### *If you could go back and start Sweet again would you?*

Yeah, I would do it again, absolutely. If I could pick my groundhog day I would do that cruise over and over again. That was like the best thing I've done in my life. I've never seen so many people so happy as a group. The volunteer projects that we did [in the Western Caribbean] my heart was in my throat the whole time. It felt so good to get in there and meet people in these communities and make an impact in a short period of time.

### *What Sweet community service are you looking forward to and does it feel like work, not play?*

In Cozumel, Mexico we are doing a baby sea turtle habitat restoration and release so I feel that's going to top it for me. I have the good fortune to be running around inspiring people to do good in the world and have fun, and no matter how you look at it, that's not work: it feels really good to give.

### *Any particular Sweet highlights for 2011?*

We're doing an Alaskan cruise in May 2011...

### *...Cue Sarah Palin joke.*

[Laughs] We're going to go clean up Sarah Palin's mess in Alaska... Then we're going to do Machu Picchu, a 24-passenger trek on the stunning eco trail. We're going to do a South African safari, too.

### *How do we grow up to be Shannon Wentworth?*

My career trajectory has been sort of random but marked by a desire to figure out a way to make doing good in the world something that is also economically viable. The crux of the business is to ask ourselves at every turn, What is Sweet: what is the right thing to do by people, what is the right thing to do by the environment? And so far, so good.

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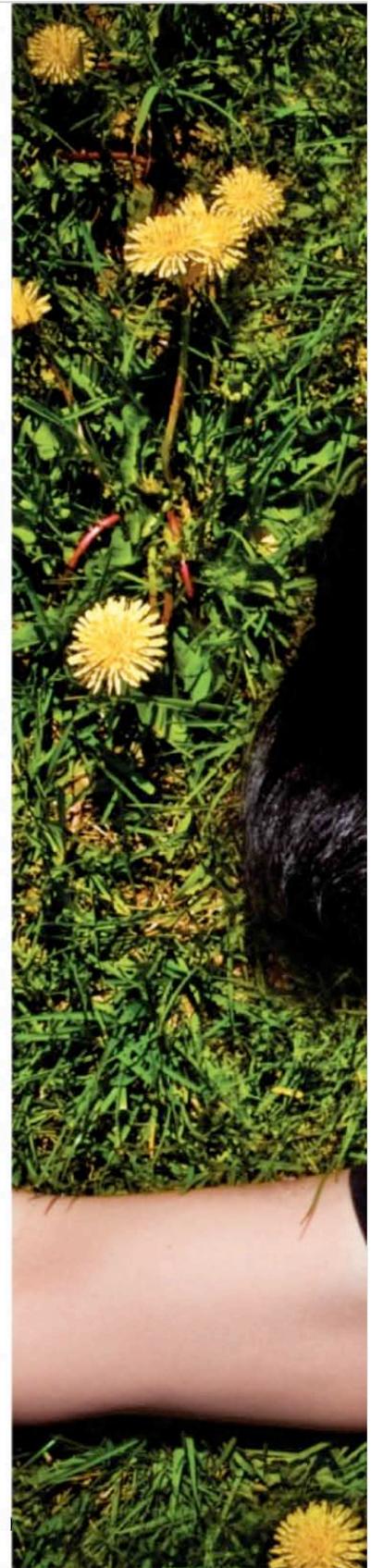




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