



Amy Rolando operates Weather Watch, a private weather forecasting business and Table For Two, a matchmaking business.

Love is In the Forecast

• After Amy Rolando started her weather forecasting firm, the climate was right to run a matchmaking business, too.

Meteorologist and matchmaker Amy Rolando says one of the few things her two businesses have in common is they both start with the letter M. Also, she says, her Minneapolis-based businesses are both forecasting services: One company forecasts weather; the other forecasts the chances of two people getting along.

For now, matchmaking generates the most revenue, a projected \$500,000 this year. Weather Watch her 6-year-old private weather forecasting business, earns more than \$100,000 each year.

But if Rolando's plans for adding a new public forecasting service are successful, the weather business will soon surpass the 3-year-old Table For Two matchmaking business.

Rolando wanted to be a meteorologist since she was 3 years old, after she witnessed a tornado at Ruttger's resort on Bay Lake, and was "fascinated by the destruction." A native of Golden Valley, she graduated with a

degree in atmospheric science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which led to a radio weather broadcasting job for Minnesota News Network, then television forecasting work for NBC affiliated in Souix City, Iowa. She returned home as an on-camera meteorologist for WCCO-TV in 1994 and 1995.

In 1993, while still doing weather radio, Rolando started her own weather forecasting sideline, serving snow plowers, landscapers, roofers and other businesses that relied on weather for their daily operations. She left WCCO to build the business, in which she is now 55 percent partner with another meteorologist, Craig Berthiaume.

Starting out as a 25-year-old women, Rolando had trouble being taken seriously by the male clients she visited. So she faxed her forecasts - twice a day, seven days a week - charging \$160 a month. Her prices now begin there and range to about \$180, with accuracy rates of about 85 percent within 24 hours, 75 percent within 48 hours.

A typical client is the Metropolitan Airports Commission, where assistant manager Cor Wagner uses Weather Watch reports to help make plans for contract services such as airport plowing. The commission uses four services, one of them the National Weather Service. Since forecasts normally differ, the commission sets its own plan based on compiled information. From his perspective, Wagner says, Weather Watch is "professional and as reliable as any weather service."

Once she had built Weather Watch, says Rolando, "we kind of saturated the market. In the nine-county Twin City metro area there are limited numbers who could use the service."

So in 1996, when a friend in Toronto asked her help establish a business matching up single professional people over lunch, Rolando was interested.

The more she learned, the more she saw a need in the Twin Cities, where 600,000 adults older than 25 are single. When her friend went on to other opportunities, Rolando picked up on the idea of matching up professional people at lunch on a first-name basis. She expanded on it, focusing on a small niche of financially stable, educated, well-balanced clients the company weeds out

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Businesses:** Weather Watch, Table For Two
- **Type:** Weather forecasting and matchmaking services
- **Location:** 119 N. Fourth St., Minneapolis
- **Owner:** Amy Rolando, 55 percent partner in WW, full owner of T for T
- **Founded:** WW, 1993. T for T, 1996
- **Employees:** WW, 2. T for T 6 full time, 2 part time
- **Revenue:** WW more than \$100,000. T for T, a projected \$500,000
- **Key competition:** WW, other national weather forecasting companies. T for T, about four Twin Cities-based companies
- **Competitive advantage:** WW's familiarity with local picture. T for T's service orientation
- **Obstacles overcome:** WW, young-and-female credibility gap with male clients. T for T, building the business at a different level than the rest of the industry.
- **Challenges ahead:** WW, launching a new phone line. T for T, expanding into other cities.

with an initial one-hour interview.

"We have to determine if we can service the client. Other places, you go in, pay a fee, you're a client."

Table For Two does criminal background checks. Five client representatives, whose own backgrounds are on the company's Web page, review files individually instead of pulling up a standard computer database. Matches are made intuitively at staff round-tables.

A 12-month active membership costs \$1,295, which can be put on hold while a client, say, travels for business. Among about 700 clients, some 30 percent are business owners, and another 30 percent come from such specific professions as physicians, attorneys and engineers.

There's no certification for matchmakers, but businesses like this carrying financial liabilities have to be bonded and licensed with the state.

A year-old Web site (Tablefor2.com) creates about 20 percent of the Table's current business; the rest comes from word of mouth, referrals and radio ads, not mailing or telemarketing. The company's goal is not marriage but to "create opportunities," says Rolando, so she measures success in terms of a "good meeting" or "pleasant time" (70 percent) and actual exchange of phone numbers (50 percent).

It was the stability of Weather Watch that first gave Rolando the ability to start Table For Two. Now the entrepreneur is ready to expand the original business by launching a Weather Watch public phone line May 15. This will be the first such service, to Rolando's knowledge, offering human interaction.

For \$4.95 per call, Rolando plans to have a meteorologist on duty 24 hours (at first she'll be one of them) giving weather information specific to time and place. A fisherman caught in a storm on Mille Lacs Lake might call from a cell phone for a storm update, give Weather Watch his latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates, and the answering meteorologist might advise on the storms speed, proximity and which way to head for shore.

A wedding and event package might help a couple plan a wedding date a year in advance based on historical weather information.

The weather on her own honeymoon might have given Rolando some ideas. Sitting at a table for two along the Italian Riviera last fall, she and her husband watched a tornado's waterspout appear unannounced, then touch down harmlessly in the ocean.