

# 'Eye of the Buyer'

## Wendy Foegen Reed '84 turns her sales training skills into an entrepreneurial success called InfoMentis

by Steve Hopkins

Last year Wendy Foegen Reed '84 (Mkt and CMS) was highlighted as one of the state's "brightest young stars" in *Georgia Trend's* "40 under 40" list. Wendy, the founder and CEO of InfoMentis, Inc., a corporate soft skills training company, was also named a finalist in Ernst and Reed's "Entrepreneur of the Year" rankings. She was featured among "Women in Business All-Stars" in *Competitive Edge* magazine.

For a mom who just a few years ago was cutting back at work to spend more time raising her three young children, life seems to have taken a somewhat ironic turn. But Wendy wouldn't want it any other way. She may spend a lot of hours jetting between home and corporate clients around the country, but she can still make time to stay closely involved with her family, coach softball, be a Girl Scout leader, and remain active in the local PTA. Colleagues call her "The Tornado."

"We teach people to keep customers," says Wendy. "We do it from the buyer's perspective. We teach you how to align yourself with their processes."

Headquartered in Alpharetta, a suburb of Atlanta, InfoMentis offers programs that build skills for managing customer relationships through the "eye of the buyer." The six-year-old company has trained more than 6,000 professionals in 25 countries. With 25 employees and ten independent contractors, it has offices in Atlanta, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, and distributors in Montreal, Canada and Sydney, Australia. Sales are now about \$7 million a year, and clients include AT&T, EMC, Oracle Corp, McKesson, PeopleSoft, and SAP.

Using methodologies Wendy developed, InfoMentis helps improve sales and service techniques throughout the customer life cycle in complex business-to-business transactions. It provides consulting services, training programs, a specialized Web-based collaborative tool called MentisWare, and customized workshops.

"We're very focused on execution," explains Wendy. "People think they have a strategy problem when it's an execution problem. Your ultimate goal should be to create a repeat buyer, someone who would

automatically come back to you."

Wendy has spent her career in the information technology industry. Prior to starting InfoMentis, she worked with Dun & Bradstreet Software and Viasoft in direct sales, marketing, and sales management, and before that at Hayes Microcomputer Products, in software selection, implementation, and support. Previously at

other complex selling markets.

All sellers face identifiable risk points in the customer lifecycle, says Wendy. "When promises have been made, if the product doesn't deliver, that's the highest risk point. The second is after the sales team sells the

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Entrepreneur Reed: she still makes time to coach softball.

Andersen Consulting, she implemented solutions in healthcare, banking, and manufacturing.

Although she has the drive and vision of a born entrepreneur, she began her company almost by accident. The year was 1996. Wendy had recently scaled

back her responsibilities at Dun and Bradstreet Software to spend more time with her then three-year-old daughter and two sons, then five and eight. Out of the blue, a friend at Oracle asked her to conduct a training session for about 20 sales staff, based simply on her skills. Wendy had never done formal training before. But she agreed (with permission of her boss).

Oracle, then a billion-dollar company, was so impressed it offered her a contract on the spot to train 500 people. So she quit her job and started DemoTechniques (whose name described the skills taught in that first workshop on product demonstrations).

The first nine months brought in \$1 million in business. Soon it became clear that Wendy's methodologies had broader applications and the company name was too restrictive. So in 1998 it was renamed InfoMentis to reflect an expanded training curriculum. Initially focused on computer software and IT consulting services fields, the company now serves large organizations in

product, the service people come in and have no idea what the original promise was. That's a big gap where relationships begin to deteriorate."

Last year she and her colleagues added Web-based MentisWare to their package. "It's a tool you use to do what we tell you to do in class. The customer has to be part of your sales team. And this is a collaborative tool to get them to be part of the process."

Wendy says Clarkson gave her a great foundation. "I was a computer-based management major. I learned how networks are designed. How you function as a liaison for business requirements." In 1983 she benefited when Clarkson became the first college to require every student to have a personal computer (the Z-100). "It was so forward thinking. ... It was all about change. It was all about innovation. It was all about the application of technology." She had been attracted to Clarkson by its mix of business, science, and engineering, and small size. "Ninety-five percent of the professors were Ph.D.'s and I knew I had direct access to those guys. I loved it there."

These days she keeps a balanced perspective by being involved at home — with the assistance of husband Mark, who juggles his schedule as her company's chief financial officer — and also in community activities. "When I'm coaching, my game schedule goes right in the company calendar," she explains. "They just book everything around it. You say, 'Look, I've got eleven girls waiting for me at the ballpark. I'm leaving.'"

And she gets the same satisfaction coaching and helping her clients. "Having that positive influence. Actually making a change and making them feel good about it. That's huge."