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Bouncing beyond a run-of-the-mill indulgence

By Abigail Leichman
Knight Ridder News Service

Perhaps you take an annual trip to Italy, looking at architecture and enjoying a week of great food.

Now imagine if you could add a twist — a private tour of the Manolo Blahnik factory, let's say, where you could order up a custom bag or pumps to ship home.

It could make the difference between a routine vacation and an experience you'd never forget.

That's what Robin Wilson calls a "wallbounce."

Members of her new Internet venture, wallbounce.com, get to purchase experiences they could never arrange on their own.

"Anybody can walk in to a couture retailer and hire their private shopper," Wilson says. "But if you're a Wallbounce member, you get the personal shopper for eight hours, who will take you to the store's private warehouse and help you choose items for a special event.

"Then, on the day of the event, a hair stylist will come prepared to do your hair and makeup based on a picture of the dress and accessories you chose."

In other words, she says, "a wallbounce takes you to a place you've never been before."

Why the wacky name?

"It was one of those rainy-day moments last January," recalls Wilson,

LIMITED-EDITION EXPERIENCES

Here are some of the experiences offered by Wallbounce:

- Afternoon tea for four at the Harlem Tearoom, with choice of 24 teas, scones with whipped cream and strawberry jam, finger sandwiches and pastries (\$125).
- "Belly to Baby" black-and-white photography sessions, just before and after baby's arrival, with photographer Amanda K (\$1,000).
- Behind-the-scenes chocolate tasting at Debaube & Gallais in Manhattan for a group of 10 (\$1,400).
- Simulated air combat in a T-34 mentor military airplane in Colorado (eight hours, \$800).
- "ReelBiography," a custom

35, a former business executive in Arlington, Va.

"I was sitting there thinking, throwing a ball against the wall, and suddenly I thought, 'That's it! Wallbounce!' I immediately bought the domain name and sat on it for eight months deciding what to do with it."

Inspiration came last summer as a group of her girlfriends listened to the description of an unforgettable evening at a backstage concert party.

"I'd pay anything to do that," one of the friends declared.

"Something went 'bling' in my mind," Wilson says. "She was saying she would love the opportunity to peer behind the curtain, and that's what I decided to provide — a way to packaging unique experiences."

Wilson figured vendors would welcome the opportunity to partner with her. "It gains them a passive customer and builds brand loyalty," she points out.

Working feverishly for 12 weeks — "I didn't sleep from August to November" — Wilson got Wallbounce up and running with a wide assortment of adventures for sale, grouped geographically and categorically.

Most are pretty pricey — the couture-and-makeup adventure described above costs \$1,800 — but she swears she talked down vendors as far as they'd go.

For example, she tapped her buddy Jenny Gering, a Manhattan celebrity stylist who fetches \$8,000 a day for her wardrobe advice and shopping expertise. Gering agreed to offer three hours of one-on-one consulting or personalized shopping at any store for a mere \$925.

"She can take you from Wal-Mart to red carpet," promises Wilson, who recently came up north to tape a segment with Oprah.

Two weeks after the site went live, Wilson had members from 17 states and the United Kingdom — the highest concentration of both vendors and clients is in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, she says — lining up to buy 33 limited-edition experiences.

Wilson is in the process of negotiations on 30 more deals, including the Manolo Blahnik tour. An auction option will premier in 2006, allowing not-for-profits to receive 75 percent of proceeds on celebrity

documentary produced by a production team, like your own A&E bio (\$12,500).

- A weeklong whitewater rafting trip for six in the remote Futaleufu region of Patagonia, lodging with local families (\$15,000).

- Custom "ultimate shirt" from Individually Suited. Choose from 70 fabrics, eight collar styles, six cuff styles and other options (\$200).

- Six hours with Hoboken, N.J. professional organizer Mary Carlomagno, plus a copy of her new book, "Give It Up!" and a home consultation (\$775).

auction items.

Gift certificates are available toward any experience, and members will soon be able to create wish lists of adventures they'd like Wallbounce to feature.

Wilson says the only thing similar to her concept are adventure travel sites that arrange personalized excursions, such as safaris to Africa. And maybe she'll find a way to make a wallbounce out of that, too.

"This is an egalitarian approach to open doors to people," she says. "We've tapped into a place where consumers want something that makes them feel special."

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