



**For Immediate Release:**

## **BRINGING THE FINAL FRONTIER INTO THE FOREFRONT**

### **VIRGIN GALACTIC APPOINTS VIRTUOSO AS THEIR EXCLUSIVE RETAIL TRAVEL GROUP IN NORTH AMERICA**

**LAS VEGAS, NV** (August 20, 2006). Today Virgin Galactic announced the appointment of prestigious travel company, Virtuoso, as their exclusive retail travel group in North America, promoting commercial space tourism to the North American market. A select group of Virtuoso's elite members will go through a comprehensive training program with Virgin Galactic to become "Accredited Space Agents," making them among the first travel consultants in the world endorsed to reserve seats on Virgin Galactic spaceflights, due to launch in late 2008. Together with Virgin Galactic, Virtuoso's member consultants will help make the dream of going into space a reality for their affluent clientele.

Selected for qualities which mirror Virgin's values and complement Virgin's experience in aviation, quality travel and adventure, Virtuoso's member consultants will be the first – *and only* – travel agents in North America to gain full accreditation, enabling them to offer their clients a unique, three-day Virgin Galactic space adventure. This once-in-a-lifetime experience includes Astronaut training, 'G force' acclimatization and a sensational spaceflight lasting over two hours.

Richard Branson, Chairman of Virgin Group, said, "Today's announcement is exciting. It makes space travel even more accessible for the general public, who will now be able to simply contact their trusted Virtuoso "Accredited Space Agent" to reserve a Virgin Galactic ticket into space. They may even find themselves being flown into space by Virgin Blue or Virgin Atlantic pilots, who are currently training to fly the Virgin Galactic spacecraft."

When Virgin Galactic was ready to bring their pioneering travel venture to the North American market, they immediately contacted Virtuoso, the company renowned for creating trips of a lifetime. Head of Astronaut Sales, Carolyn Wincer, says of the group, "Virtuoso was our first choice for the U.S. As the leaders in luxury travel, we knew Virtuoso's members would understand and embrace this new opportunity. Their consultants possess three key assets that make them the ideal ambassadors for Virgin Galactic: they are at the forefront of exciting trends in travel; they are adept at selling exceptional experiential travel; and, they have a roster of clientele that are ideal candidates for space travel."

"Our members have never shied away from ground-breaking ideas; it's what keeps us ahead of the game," says Matthew Upchurch, CEO of Virtuoso, of the network's member agencies. Upchurch continues, "People never expected to be able to travel into space, but they didn't expect to vacation in Burma 30 years ago, either. Through this relationship with Virgin Galactic, we have the ability to take people to the next level in experiential travel. Adding space travel to their list of offerings will continue to set our members apart from other travel agents and reinforces their position as innovators in the life experience business."

## **Virgin Galactic and Virtuoso**

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With a price tag of \$200,000 per spaceflight, the relationship with Virgin Galactic exceeds the “cool factor” and becomes a very lucrative venture, as Virtuoso consultants will earn commission on each sale. The initial offering for “Founder” flights, the first 100 people to experience commercial space travel, is near full already.

To date, the world has seen fewer than 500 astronauts, but with the launch of Virgin Galactic spaceflights and the help of Virtuoso’s agencies, that is poised for change. This effort will reach the general public thanks in large part to the space craftsmanship of Burt Rutan and the deep pockets of Paul Allen. However, it is because of Richard Branson’s love for all things adventure that the average, untrained civilian can become a “Virgin Galactic Astronaut.”

### **About Virgin Galactic**

Virgin Galactic is a company established by Richard Branson's Virgin Group to undertake the challenge of developing space tourism for everybody. It will own and operate privately built spaceships, modeled on the history-making SpaceShipOne craft. These spaceships will allow affordable sub-orbital space tourism for the first time in our history. Virgin Galactic will run as a business with the sole purpose of making space travel more and more affordable to people throughout the world. They will reinvest funds made over the first few years back into the business striving constantly to lower prices.

### **Virgin Galactic Three-Day Experience**

After three days of exciting preparation, bonding and training, passengers will board the spaceship, which climbs to 50,000 feet while attached to a specially designed carrier aircraft – an intrinsically safer way to launch than vertically from the ground. From here, the spaceship releases from the carrier and climbs vertically, reaching the speed of sound in 10 seconds and around four times the speed of sound in under 30 seconds, all while powered by a clean and safe hybrid rocket motor.

Traveling at over 3,000 miles an hour, the G-force surge will push the would-be astronauts back into their seats as they head into the black sky and a maximum altitude of about 75 miles above the earth's surface. When the rocket motor shuts down, everyone on board will experience the silence of space and the magic of weightlessness. They will be able to see the curvature of the earth and 1,000 miles in any direction. They will also see the atmosphere protecting the earth.

Passengers will experience about five minutes of weightlessness before the spacecraft returns to earth, passing back through the atmosphere without a heat build-up thanks to the unique wing feathering technology, and making a normal runway landing.

### **About Virtuoso**

Virtuoso is an exclusive network comprising more than 6,000 elite travel consultants, associated with 309 agencies in 22 countries throughout North America, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Australia and New Zealand. With annual sales of \$3.8 billion, Virtuoso’s member agencies make the group the most powerful in the luxury travel segment. Their relationships with the world’s best travel companies provide the network’s affluent clientele with incredible values, rare experiences and privileged access. For more information, please visit [www.virtuoso.com](http://www.virtuoso.com).

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