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FOR WOMEN ON THE LEADING EDGE

MARCH*APRIL 2008

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DENISE CANON

on pursuing dreams,
building a business
and living a full life



well- travelled

Interviewed by Sheridan Sechter
Photographed by Amy Schlatter, The Rye Studio

As President and CEO of Travel Concepts, Denise Canon has helped her clients see the world. Now, join us as we step inside hers.

cover story

Please tell us why you decided to start a travel business.

My entrepreneurial spirit was calling me. I had always loved the adventure of travel from an early age. Throughout my business career, I have worked in jobs that involved some aspect of travel. I had been in the business for over twenty years when I found myself at the crossroads of working for another travel company, and my mounting desire to pursue my dreams of having a more independent career lifestyle. It's important to pursue what you love. I love working with people, dreaming their dreams, and creating a fabulous travel experience for them. I believed that I could create a successful travel business based on hard work, determination, and an ingredient seldom found in today's fast-paced world of homogenized, pre-packaged travel – good old-fashioned customer service.

How did you get started?

I started my business in the fourth bedroom of our home. I created a check-list of what I felt was important to start a business with the assistance of my sister-in-law, who had already established her computer technology business. The shoestring process was simple and included understanding the importance and accountability of the city, state and federal government, as well as establishing the necessary credentials in the travel and cruise industry. Creating the business identity was critical, and this was accomplished with the assistance of my husband and family members.

Do you specialize in certain destinations or types of travel?

We provide our services with undeniable integrity. Our services span four broad areas:

Corporate planning (incentives, meetings and events); customized group travel (family reunions, organizations, associations, special interest); romance experiences (honeymoons, destination weddings, anniversaries); and

vacation packages including customized features and complete management.

What has been your biggest business challenge and how did you overcome it?

Without a doubt, it was the events and after-math of 9/11. The entire travel industry was greatly impacted. Our main focus during that time was assisting our clients. When many of our clients were stranded as a result of the grounding of planes after this tragedy, we worked diligently to help them get home. Sales were non-existent for many weeks and months following. Our daily efforts were directed toward customer care and service. The challenge was to ride out that terrible storm, with the hopes that our efforts would eventually result in the return of past and new clients, and that our revenues would rebound.

What is your role in the business?

As President and CEO of Travel Concepts, my duties are plentiful! My primary role is to create an environment that empowers my staff with knowledge and tools to be the best at what they do. My strength is sales and customer relations. I am in the daily trenches working with various clients, discussing their dreams and creating the experiences that will ultimately be their most treasured journey.

How has the internet impacted your business?

On-line travel booking sites are competitors. It used to bother me, but no more. If a prospective client wants an expert to assist with their much anticipated dreams and experiences, our services will be sought out and eventually engaged. I believe it's a similar mindset when seeking another professional service. For example, if you need an attorney, you can certainly research many aspects of law on the internet. In the end, you need to determine what type of experience is important to you.





“Those I admire most are those who have greater challenges than I. I am blessed with my health, family, friends and the career I have always dreamed of.”

What has been the most rewarding aspect of your career?

We will be celebrating twelve years in business in April which is extremely rewarding.

More rewarding than my career is my family. They are first and foremost in my life. In addition to my parents, 3 siblings, spouses and their children, my husband and I are blessed with our two sons, Matthew and Andrew and our daughter, Michele, and her husband, Jordan.

What resources have you used to grow and sustain your business?

My main support system since its inception has been the Kansas Women's Business Center (KWBC). This association has directed me to many ongoing education and networking opportunities. I have participated in classes and growth roundtable groups facilitated by the KWBC, which meets twice a month. Through the KWBC, I was awarded the opportunity to be mentored by the Athena Powerlink program. This year-long program matched me with various astute business leaders from our community, hand-picked to match the needs of my business goals. It's an absolutely awesome resource for women entrepreneurs in the Kansas City area.

The women in my KWBC growth roundtable group provide continued support, inspiration and friendship, and they have truly been an integral role in my overall success. Additionally, my membership in the Lenexa Chamber of Commerce and my relationship experience with my bank, Premier Bank in Lenexa, has provided strong support.

My staff is phenomenal. Their dedication and hard work is a reminder to me that success has been achieved only through the efforts of the team environment at Travel Concepts.

And, kudos to *flourish!* It is through your networking events that I have met so many who have inspired me to 'kick it up a notch'. And, now I'm humbled and excited to join the ranks of the many incredible women who have been featured as your cover girls.

Please tell us about your mentors.

First and foremost is my Mother, Helen Galvin. She always inspired me to follow my dreams, reach for the stars, and never look back. Although she didn't own her own business, the facets of running our home became her business. Dad traveled a lot during our growing years so Mom became the mistress of multi-tasking. I learned it best from her.

Additionally, I am mentored by the women in my growth roundtable group, as well as others I have met or read about. It's a matter of taking the time to focus, pay attention to what surrounds you, and empower yourself with the knowledge and spirit of this fabulous universe.

And, of course, Oprah! She is an inspiration to me and a great example of what can happen when you set your goals high and never look back!

What is your favorite vacation destination?

I absolutely love Hawaii and her islands. Kauai is my favorite. It depicts the true essence of these incredibly gorgeous islands. Not only did I fall in love with these islands, I met my husband there as well. We're celebrating our twentieth anniversary this year!

Do you have a philosophy on life and/or business that you'd like to share?

My simple philosophy on life is to treat others as you would like to be treated. My philosophy on business is that life is about inspiration and dedication. You must have both to achieve success and accomplish goals. And, integrity is everything.

Whom do you admire most, and why?

I am not sure that I could name just one as there are many. Life, in itself, is a daily journey. Those I admire most are those who have greater challenges than I. I am blessed with my health, family, friends and the career I have always dreamed of. You have to keep your own obstacles and challenges in perspective.

Denise Canon, President & CEO • Travel Concepts
9324 Rosner Drive, Suite A • Lenexa, KS 66219
Ph: 913.888.1671 • www.travelconceptskc.com