

A First Class Ticket To Spectacular!



Denise Canon built a successful travel business based on hard work, determination, and an ingredient seldom found in today's fast-paced world of homogenized, prepackaged travel – good old-fashioned customer service.

By Bert Bodeewes

For most people, the thought of slipping away to a lush, tropical island wrapped in white, pristine beaches and crystal blue waters, is an adventure found only in the pages of popular romance novels. But for Denise Canon, CEO of Travel Concepts, Inc., (www.travelconceptskc.com), it's just one of the many storybook dream vacations that she's been helping her clients experience for more than 11 years.

"Our number one goal is to fulfill our clients' dreams and exceed their greatest expectations in all that we do," Canon says.

Canon was born with an entrepreneurial spirit. As an ambitious young girl growing up in Kansas, she could hardly wait until she was old enough to work. After landing her first job at a fast food restaurant in her neighborhood, she was off and running.

"I pretty much did whatever I could to earn money. I would just work, work, work, and save money so my girlfriend and I could take advantage of student travel discounts and embark on adventures around the country."

After high school, Canon was eager to get on with her life, and immediately settled into a full-time job. She began paying notes on a car and rent to her apartment landlord. But, on a whim, she moved to Los Angeles and became involved in the radio entertainment industry where she learned all about travel-related promotional giveaways.

After eight years on the West Coast, she found her way back to Kansas City and took a job as promotion director at a prominent Country Western radio station.

"It was a fun job," she says. "It allowed me to be creative and sharpen my entrepreneurial skills. Looking back, it was probably what pivoted me into the whole travel venue because most of their promotions were about trips, cash, cars and other prizes."

Eventually, Canon would go on to share her growing skill set with a myriad of companies in the Kansas City area, and even partner with a friend to form a small marketing and promotions business. With each successive job, she was gaining valuable sales and marketing experience and building a reputation as a knowledgeable and trustworthy expert in the travel industry. The sky was the limit, and Canon was on her way to exciting new heights in her life.



Photo courtesy of Jamaica Tourist Board

But in 1993, it all came crashing down when she abruptly lost her job as the manager of a leisure travel department at a prominent Kansas City area cruise and travel company.

"I'll never forget it," Canon remembers. "I was called into the owner's office. Out of nowhere, I was told that our relationship was over. It wasn't about job performance. It wasn't about anything other than the fact that they were just cutting management."

She was devastated. Christmas was only a few weeks away, and she was seven weeks pregnant. But Canon didn't sit around pondering over her misfortune in the workplace. Instead, she reached inside and tapped into something every successful entrepreneur possesses – a winning spirit, and a passion to pursue her lifelong dream of having her own business.

"In the long run, losing my job was truly a blessing in disguise," she explains. "I wasn't happy there, and I was getting the bug to do my own thing."

So she rolled up her sleeves and booked the best vacation she could ask for, an all-inclusive trip to the greatest destination of all – her own success.

Canon graciously offered to share her story with Millionaire Blueprints – from the industry downturn after 9/11 – to the can-do attitude that permeates every part of her life and her million-dollar business.



Photo courtesy of Jamaica Tourist Board

Was the travel industry difficult to break into?

No. There were a lot of people doing travel when I started out, but it was mostly corporate travel. I wasn't interested in the corporate side. The lure of it, for me anyway, is that I enjoy creating an experience for someone. I enjoy dreaming their dreams, and taking those dreams and molding them into some type of tangible experience.

What set your new company apart from other travel agencies?

It's all about customer service. Even today, as trends move toward the Internet, point and click and self service,

we've still maintained high levels of touch. So I felt we could offer a different edge to what we could bring to the table for a client.

What was the first thing you did to start your business?

First and foremost, I wanted to make sure that everything was legal. So my sister-in-law, who had a computer technology business at the time, helped

me develop a checklist of everything I needed to do to get started. We went down the list and checked off each item. It was a shoestring type of process.

What were some of the items on that checklist?

The most specific things were getting the business in line with state and federal regulations. For example, I needed to get a tax ID number. I also needed to open a business checking account because you don't want to use your personal account to handle your business transactions. We also had to create a logo, business cards, stationery and just some of the basics as far as supplies go.

What were your costs to start the business, and how did you use those funds?

It cost me around \$2,500 to get started. Keep in mind that I already had the office space in my home. It went toward various office supplies, obtaining the city, state and federal requirements, to design my logo, and to print letterhead and business cards.

What kind of equipment is required to run a travel agency?

You don't need a lot of equipment, but you must have a phone, a computer, a printer, a fax machine, and a high-speed Internet connection to network your travel-related software to the outside world. You also need a dedicated business phone line. A crucial mistake I made was not getting a separate business line. As a result, I had people calling our home 24/7. After about six months, I created very specific hours of operation with a dedicated business phone and fax lines. A separate business line is one of the main features you need to enhance the identity of "doing business as."

Did you formulate a business plan before you started out?

I did not have a formal business plan. I basically had my own knowledge of the travel industry and I did a lot of research about what it took to start a company. I didn't know a lot about running a business. I learned by trial and error. I'm proud that I survived. In hindsight, however, that's not a very smart way to go. I would certainly recommend that others start out with a formal plan.

Where did you obtain your start-up funds?

The money I used to start the company came out of my own pocket. However, I did meet with various bankers to discuss my plans, to talk about the "what-ifs," and to see whether I needed a loan or a line of credit. Support and a strong relationship has been steadfast with Premier Bank, providing high-touch professional and personal customer care.

Does this type of business require a lot of start-up capital?

Not really. In the travel industry, we don't have a long list of receivables. When people want to travel somewhere, they have to pay for the trip immediately. So we don't have the outstanding account balances that other industries have. That means immediate cash flow. And that's a blessing.

What kind of business structure did you choose for Travel Concepts?

It was very important to me that Travel Concepts have its own business identity. So, on April 1, 1996, I officially incorporated the company.

How did you advertise your new company?

Since I had worked as an independent consultant in the industry for a number of years, I was fortunate to start out with an established base of about 30 clients. But I needed to let these individuals know that I was now Travel Concepts rather than Denise Canon, independent consultant. So I wrote a letter on our official letterhead and attached my business card. The letter simply introduced Travel Concepts, and told them how much I appreciated their business. Then I identi-

fied the types of services the company would be offering, and told them that we would appreciate their continuing loyalty, as well as any future referrals.

Are referrals important to you?

In the beginning, they were our life's blood because we had only 30 clients. We were really depending on them to spread the word about Travel Concepts. Today, client referrals are still very important to us. But we also receive referrals from businesses. Since we're in the niche market of the honeymoon "romance" industry, we refer business to people we know will do a good job. And in return, they do the same for us.

What was your niche market when you first started out?

I had been to Hawaii a number of times, and even met my husband, Milling, there. That location was my personal favorite, and I initially sent many clients there. We quickly developed a niche for group travel and the romance market including honeymoons. After we built a solid foundation there, we pursued the destination wedding niche. To this day, the destination weddings are a very lucrative piece of business for Travel Concepts.

What exactly is a destination wedding?

A destination wedding is when the bride and groom decide to have their wedding in a location other than near their place of residence. It might be held in Hawaii, Italy, or Greece, or any other exotic location that magnifies the beauty of the event. Typically, everyone who is involved – whether they are members of the wedding party or part of the audience – is a potential client for us due to their travel and lodging needs to and from the event. That's why destination weddings are so lucrative.

Where is your office located?

I run Travel Concepts out of my home in much the same way I did when I was an independent consultant. What I've always liked about working from home is that I've been able to raise my children and be available for them. Don't get me wrong, it hasn't been easy. It's been very challenging at times, especially when my children were babies. But I like being at home. I like having the access. It's worked for our clients as well. At times, we've had clients who were stranded due to unavoidable circumstances. They needed our help immediately. All I had to do was go downstairs and get on the computer, and I could help them through various situations. They've never had to



Denise Canon with her husband, Milling.



The Canon family from left, Andrew, 13, Michelle, 21, Milling, Denise, and Matt, 18.

wait for me to open the next day like a regular office.

Do you have a dedicated office space in your home?

In the beginning, I had a bedroom and a converted loft. But four years ago, we moved from the house that I originally had the business in, and built a new house three blocks away. I brought in technical people to design a new office space tailored exactly to my specifications. It was much more functional than working out of a converted bedroom with cords running all over the place.

Are there any downsides to working from home?

I used to think so, and even considered getting a retail space once. But when 9/11 happened, the entire industry shifted. A lot of companies either folded or gave up their retail space, and the owners started working from home. Being at home has worked out well for me.

Did you obtain help from any professional organizations along the way?

I enlisted the help of an organization called the Kansas Women’s Business Center (KWBC) (www.kansaswbc.com). The KWBC has been in operation since July 2000. Through consultation and mentoring, this group helps women entrepreneurs as they grow their businesses through every stage. From this resource, my roundtable group was formed. We meet twice a month and discuss various topics on how to continue to run profitable small businesses. It’s an absolutely



Canon and husband Milling, celebrated the 10th anniversary of Travel Concepts, Inc. at the historic Renee Kelly’s Caenen Castle in Shawnee, Kansas.

awesome resource for women entrepreneurs in the Kansas City area.

Do you recommend a group like this for new business owners?

Absolutely. I think a lot of women are unaware of the resources that are available because they haven’t sought assistance. It’s important to place yourself in an environment that inspires you to grow and reach out. I’d advise getting involved in this type of group. You have to make a commitment to yourself and to the people you’re meeting with about what you want to get out of it. As a business owner, you’re not really accountable to anyone. So it’s nice to have someone help hold you accountable to your ideals and your checklist of things that must be accomplished.

What have you learned from this organization?

I’ve learned a lot about accounting, marketing and a variety of other business concepts. They even assigned a team to help me redesign my logo.

Does your company have a mission statement?

It took quite some time to develop my mission statement because it had to come from my soul. It had to speak volumes about our daily existence in this business. It permeates every customer contact. Our statement reads: *“We are passionate about our clients, their dreams and creating the optimum travel experience. We are customer service experts, utilizing innovative global solutions and our own unique insight to ensure a quintessential vacation experience and a journey beyond your expectations.”*

Were you ever worried that Travel Concepts would fail?

I’m the kind of person who is determined to give something a try. I was certainly prepared to work very hard, but I was also prepared to face the fact that, if it didn’t work out, I could always go out and get a job.



Canon believes that the roundtable meetings she attends twice a month at the Kansas Women’s Business Center are an important part of her success. Members from left, are Kimberly Deveney, Sherry Turner – Executive Director of the Center, Debbie Scott, Denise Canon, Amanda Mindham, Chris Jackson, Judy Mathews – Program Director, and Rebecca MacKinnon, one of Canon’s mentors in the Athena Powerlink program.

What kind of marketing do you do today?

We are always seeking opportunities to appeal to a wide range of clients. For our romance market, we have a booth presence every January and July at an event called Bridal Spectacular here in Kansas City. It's a huge event coordinated by the Kansas City Weddings magazine (www.kcweddings.com), where about 2,500 prospective brides and grooms come to see everything wedding-related. It does a lot to put our company in front of potential honeymooners. Last year, we were invited to be the exclusive travel provider for White, an upscale bridal event (www.thewhiteevent.com). *Kansas City Weddings* magazine co-sponsors it with Michael Nolte, a prominent wedding coordinator.

Do you do any online marketing?

Yes. In addition to our Web site, we're online with The Knot (www.the-knot.com). We receive a considerable amount of business from them. We're also in their magazine, *The Knot*.

Why do people come to you for their travel needs?

People want our expertise and management. That's what we promote. We will manage every last detail. We tell potential clients that we are not an agency where they will simply purchase "cookie cutter" travel arrangements. If that's what they want, we advise them to do it themselves. If they're looking for a company that has the knowledge to consult with them, to offer them options, and to manage the details, then they've come to the right place. That's what we're all about. We become our clients' advocate if any problems occur during their travel.

This sounds like the difference between fast food and a fine restaurant.

That's right. I use that analogy often. If you're hungry and you just want something quickly, then you're going to drive through a place, order from a set menu, pick it up, and five bucks later, you've



Photo courtesy of the Puerto Vallarta Tourism Board.

got a meal. But if you're looking for choices and full service, you're going to go to a nice restaurant. That's what makes us different.

What types of services do you offer now?

We do corporate planning, incentives, meetings, events, customized group travel, and romance travel. Romance travel encompasses honeymoons, destination weddings and anniversaries. We can customize components of travel, or entire packages, because we work with a lot of different wholesalers. Of course, the client's budget dictates what level of experience they are looking for.

So upscale customer service, rather than offering the cheapest prices, is your preferred business model?

Absolutely! We tell our clients, "If you want a company that will provide you with that wonderful, good old-fashioned full service and that will always be available to you, that's us. If you want to find the cheapest rates out there, then you probably need to search the Internet and find it yourself." We're so committed to customer service that I've been known to give my cell phone number out to my clients, just in case anything should happen on a trip.

Denise Canon's Eight Steps To Travel Success

- 1 Services** – Determine what you want to offer.
- 2 Competition** – Know your competition; then find a way to set your agency apart.
- 3 Licensing** – Research all aspects of doing business as a company, and understand fully what licenses or permits your city or state requires (the pros/cons regarding corporations, sole proprietorships, etc.)
- 4 Smart Money** – Be knowledgeable regarding accounting issues, or hire someone who is.
- 5 Company Name** – Make sure it's powerful and informative, but that it doesn't infringe on another business in your area.
- 6 Office Structure** – Consider your office – retail versus home office – and all of the costs involved.
- 7 Professional** – Build a productive business environment with the right office equipment and supplies.
- 8 Credibility** – Become affiliated with a travel or cruise organization.

What tools do you use in the industry?

To book airline travel, we use a system called Amadeus (www.amadeus.com). It's actually the old SystemOne application from the Continental Airlines days. They updated it and made it more user-friendly. Then they changed the name to Amadeus. It's a software package that can be loaded on your computer at the office, and used to access the global airlines system through a networked host agency.

What do you mean by a "host agency?"

Although we have the front end software loaded here at the office, Amadeus works by accessing a networked host agency which, in turn, connects to the global airlines system. It's kind of like a middle man. So in order to use Amadeus, you need to partner with someone who is a licensed host provider and pay them a fee for access to the system. In our case, we use MDC Travel (www.mdctravel.com). They are a licensed host, and we are a user of that host.

Could you become a host, yourself, and save paying the access fee?

I did research that possibility, but it just wasn't cost-effective. It's easier for us to have the end-user functionality and let someone else run the host. It actually works really well for us. We can set up and lock in the reservation, and when the ticket is ready to be issued, all we do is e-mail MDC. They then send us the electronic itinerary.

How do you keep track of your clients?

It was relatively easy to keep track of contact details when we had only 30 clients at the start. However, we now have more than 2,000 active clients. To help manage them, we have a contact management database system that is designed exclusively for travel agencies. It's called ClientBase Plus, and it's offered through an organization called TRAMS (www.trams.com). With ClientBase Plus, we can manage our clients' trips and reservations, do invoicing and itinerary printing, and so much more. It speaks the language

of our industry. There's an annual fee to use it. I think it's around \$800 a year.

Do you personally visit the destinations that you sell travel packages to?

Yes. I do visit a lot of the locations. It's great when you can tell your clients firsthand what their trip is going to be like. Being in the industry allows you to connect with people, their emotions, their passions and their spirits. When helping my clients plan their adventures, I use the analogy that we are starting out with a blank canvas on an easel. Then we begin painting the picture of the adventure they want. When the planning stage is complete, they have this gorgeous, life-like picture that vividly presents the package they will experience.

How do you help a client choose a travel package?

It's important to build a profile about what they're looking for. With our knowledge, and our destination expertise, we are able to plug them in with some options. Let's say we're planning a couple's honeymoon. Typically, I'll ask these questions: When is the wedding date? When do you want to leave? Do you have a perceived budget? Then I'll usually interject some personal and professional thoughts. For example, if they're getting married on a Saturday, they might want to wait until Monday to leave, depending on where they want to travel. Or if they're considering a honeymoon when children are out of school, and they want privacy, they might want to consider another date. It's all about listening to the clients and understanding their needs.

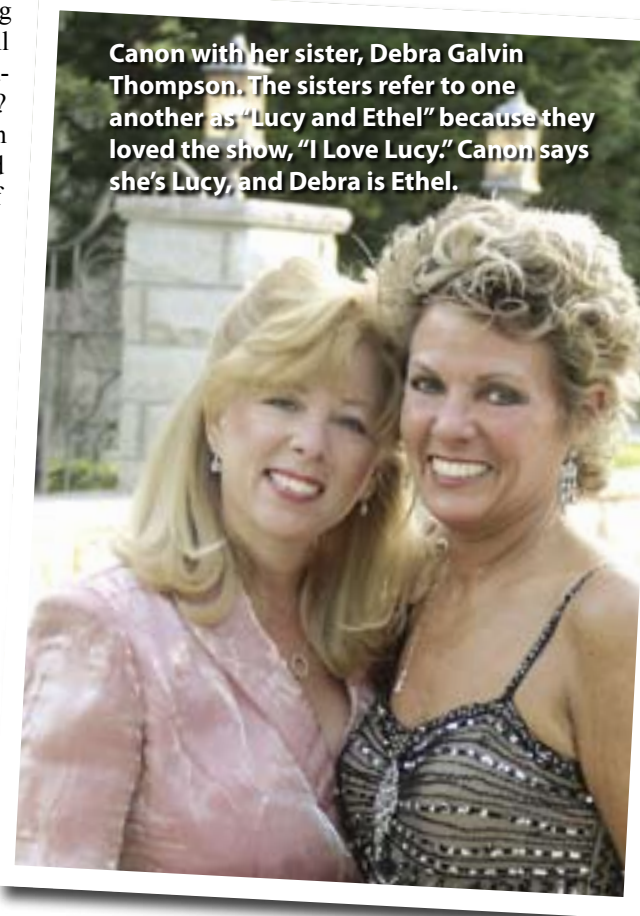
What is your most popular trip for couples?

Right now, there are three trips that most couples want to experience, whether they're honeymooning or just getting away. First on the hit list is Hawaii because it's a very romantic tropical destination. Mexico is next because of its value-added components, and because it offers more of the all-inclusive style vacations such as Cancun, The Riviera

Maya, Puerto Vallarta, Cabo San Lucas or Mazatlan. Cruising is also extremely popular. It satisfies many of the same requirements as the all-inclusive concept. It also gives individuals the choice of several different destinations, depending on the length of the trip they request.

Do you receive a discount on the hotels or airfare that you sell in order to generate profit for your company?

We typically receive a commission from each hotel vendor. The average commission is 10 percent on the room rate. Taxes are additional. If it is a group (which is usually 10 plus rooms per night), there are instances when we will negotiate a non-commissionable rate with the hotel. None of the airlines provide a commission, so we attach a service fee on our airline tickets and car rentals as well. Since we see ourselves as "consultants," not order takers, we have emerged as such.



Canon with her sister, Debra Galvin Thompson. The sisters refer to one another as "Lucy and Ethel" because they loved the show, "I Love Lucy." Canon says she's Lucy, and Debra is Ethel.

How does your company generate profit when you book an all-inclusive travel package?

The vendors we work with pay us commissions. The typical starting percentage is 10 percent on the base sale (before taxes) – with levels up to 18 percent – depending upon the sales/volume we produce. We are a member of **Vacation.com**, which is one of the leading consortiums. They have a preferred vendor list. As a member, we tend to work with these preferred vendors for the stronger commission levels – only if it presents an advantage for our clients. After all, exceptional customer service is what we’re about.

Do you prefer any particular cruise line?

The Holland America Line (www.hollandamerica.com) and Carnival Cruise Lines (www.carnival.com) are our two preferred partner relationships. They work really hard for us, and they have reached out to us as a “partner.” But we certainly work with all different cruise lines including, but not limited to, Celebrity, Princess, Royal Caribbean, Costa and Windstar. It just depends on what the client is looking for.

What do you mean when you say you “partner” with cruise lines, and what benefits do you obtain from these partnerships? Do you receive reduced fares or exclusive bookings?

Our “partnerships” with certain vendors, such as cruise lines or tour operators and wholesalers, position us to drive the majority of our business through them where applicable. We make sure it makes sense for our clients in regard to value, destinations and services. Some of the advantages, or benefits, include receiving their proactive customer service when we truly need it. For instance, we might be able to upgrade a cruise stateroom at no additional cost to a client based on the availability with the vendor. Or, we might provide extra amenities at no additional charge such as having champagne waiting in the room or cabin, a romantic dinner

for two, a shipboard credit, or dollars for the client to spend on the resort. These features are provided at no additional cost due to our relationship and high level of customer service on behalf of our clients. This way, everybody wins!

A common perception is that travel agencies are allowed to buy a “block” of cruise tickets at greatly discounted prices, and then resell them for a profit. Is that true?

We are not a high-volume producing cruise agency, so I’m not able to provide a comment on that. When we “sell” a cruise, our commission is obtained in the same fashion as with our vacation packages. Each cruise line offers a different commission structure, which is all based on your performance and sales. There are tiers to provide an incentive for selling more.

Do you obtain feedback from clients after their travels?

When our clients return home, we send them a survey. The questions include: How was the travel experience? Were your expectations met or exceeded? Are there any improvements you feel should be made to the hotel, airline, ground transportation company, entertainment, food and beverage, and optional excursions? If we receive positive feedback, that’s great. We call and thank them, and we ask them to refer people to us. If the comments aren’t spectacular, then we need to know why. We do everything we can to fix any situation. We’re very proactive about that.

What are some of the challenges of having your own company?

Time management is probably my biggest challenge. I’m one of those type-A individuals who has to have her hands in everything. I delegate as much as I can, and everyone has their own job responsibilities. For me, though, it’s a constant struggle.

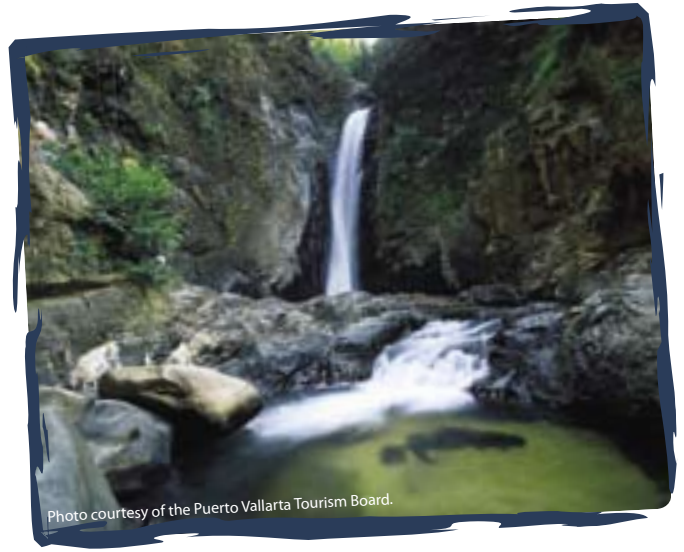


Photo courtesy of the Puerto Vallarta Tourism Board.

What kind of effect did 9/11 have on the travel industry?

I think it changed a lot of businesses. It certainly changed mine. We had a lot of people stranded, and we had no revenue for a good period of time. So we just reached out, did the right thing and became an active customer support system for our clients. People entrusted their dollars and their dreams with us, so we started searching through our files to see what solutions we could offer them to get home safely. That was our focus – one human being helping another human being. It was a true test of customer service. I thought that if we could help people through this tragic time, they would tell others how well we performed. And they did.

How many employees do you have today?

I have two wonderful women who work with me. Diane Stears has been with me for eight years, and she’s my sales manager as well as a travel and cruise consultant. She’s phenomenal at what she does. My other employee is Heather Underwood. Heather’s been with me almost six years, and she’s my office manager as well as a travel and cruise consultant. She’s incredibly organized and very customer-service oriented.

Do you have a special formula for finding the right employees for a small company?

I've been very fortunate. I always say, "You've got to have the right people on the bus." These ladies are just good, trustworthy people who come from strong, moral backgrounds. I also think there's something to be said about the credentials of your company and the amount of time your people spend with you. You have to aspire to be a great teacher, and I hope I've been able to do that. That's what the book, *Good to Great* is about – surrounding yourself in an environment that inspires you to grow.

You've worked hard to make this business successful. Have you been able to reach the million-dollar status personally, or just through the company?

It is primarily through the company at this point.

What one ingredient do you think is critical to a company's success?

Without a doubt, it's integrity. My integrity, personally and professionally, is everything. What matters most to me is that it stays intact. At the end of each day, there should be only one question I need to ask myself. "Did my company do everything we promised our clients today?" The answer should always be an unequivocal "yes."

How does it feel to help others make their travel dreams come true?

It's an ah-ha moment, you know, when you work very hard to make your clients' dreams come true, and you do so beyond their grandest expectations. Personally, I feel very satisfied knowing that we are able to make that happen. I aspire to wake up each day and do that for every one of our clients.

What important business lessons have you learned in operating your own company?

Knowledge is powerful, and networking is everything. I've also learned how to think and act like a CEO. That, in itself, gave me a whole different identity.



Canon, center, with Diane Stears, left, Travel Concepts sales manager and travel/cruise consultant, and Heather Underwood, right, office manager and travel/cruise consultant.



Canon, far right, participated in the Susan G. Koman 3-Day/60-mile Breast Cancer Walk held last year in Kansas City. Visit www.travelconceptskc.com/Team_Iris.htm to learn more about the event.

There's a book that our women's roundtable studied several years ago called *How To Think Like a CEO: The 22 Vital Traits You Need to Be the Person at the Top* by D. A. Benton. It helps you identify the traits you need to improve your leadership role in a company.

What are your future plans for Travel Concepts?

I'd like to obtain more group business, because that is such a lucrative area. We're working toward that end.

Can you leave us with any tips that might help a budding entrepreneur become more successful?

Yes. Remember that ongoing education is essential to any business. That is one thing that has made Travel Concepts so successful in the long run. A big mistake that I made in the very beginning was not empowering myself with more tactical skills necessary to run a business effectively. I didn't have a business or marketing plan. I just had basic business skills. Most people know a lot about what

they're doing, but they don't know how to utilize that knowledge. Make it a point to learn about liability insurance, learn how to delegate, how to outline employee manuals, how to write job descriptions – those kinds of things. Through continuing education, and through my women's business group, I've learned how to run a profitable business and tackle any obstacles that might come my way.

Canon lives her life, and runs her business, based on very simple philosophy.

"It doesn't matter how wealthy you become or how famous you are. For me, it all boils down to one principle in the business world. If you can't look in the mirror at the end of the day and tell yourself that you treated each one of your clients the way you would want to be treated, then you need to re-evaluate," she says.

Coming from a lady who has worked tirelessly to make so many others' dreams come true, we think those are wise words to live by. MB

RESOURCES

If you're passionate about travel, and want to share your enthusiasm with others, take a look at some of the resources we've found for you. There might be something here to help get you cruising in the right direction.

TRAVEL CONCEPTS
www.travelconceptskc.com
877.200.4690

9324 Rosner Drive, Suite A
 Lenexa, Kansas 66219
 Denise Canon's company Web site.

WOMEN'S BUSINESS GROUPS

Kansas Women's Business Center (KWBC)
www.kansaswbc.com
 Denise Canon praises this group for helping put her business on the road to success.

U.S. Small Business Administration
 Office of Women's Business Ownership
 Entrepreneurial Development
www.sba.gov/womeninbusiness
 A great source of information for women who aspire to become business owners.

Chamber of Commerce.com
www.chamberofcommerce.com
 Your local Chamber of Commerce can help you find women's business groups in your area. Click the Resource Directory link to find the Chamber of Commerce nearest you.

TRAVEL INDUSTRY TOOLS

Amadeus
www.amadeus.com
 The preferred airline booking system for travel professionals around the world.

ClientBase Plus
www.trams.com
 The be-all, do-all client contact solution that is specifically designed for the travel industry.

Sabre
www.sabre.com
 The industry's premier GDS system with instant access to cruise lines, hotels, rental car agencies and airlines.

HELPFUL READING

Start Your Own Travel Agency
www.fabjob.com/travelconsultant.asp
 A downloadable e-book explaining every aspect of starting a travel agency.

Guide to Starting and Operating a Successful Travel Agency by Laurence Stevens
 Another great book on how to start a travel agency.

Good To Great by Jim Collins
www.jimcollins.com
 Do you have the right people on the bus? Pick up Mr. Collins' book, or visit his Web site to find out.

How to Think Like a CEO: The 22 Vital Traits You Need to Be the Person at the Top by D.A. Benton
 Lists the 22 traits necessary to become a successful CEO.

The E-Myth Revisited by Michael E. Gerber
 Practical business advice for the small business owner.

TRADE SHOWS

Travel Industry Wire
www.travelindustrywire.com
 This is the place to find out what's going on around the world in the travel industry.

The Trade Show
www.thetradeshows.org
 The largest travel-oriented trade show of its kind.

INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

The National Association of Commissioned Travel Agents
www.nacta.com
 A national trade association that represents the interests of home-based travel agents, outside sales travel agents and cruise-oriented travel agents.

Vacation.com
www.vacation.com
 A popular travel marketing service that provides access to over 5,100 travel agencies throughout Canada and the United States. A must-join organization for the serious travel agent.

International Association Travel Agents Network
www.iatan.org
 This association provides a wide variety of

products, services and educational tools to aid the travel industry.

The American Society of Travel Agents
www.astanet.com
 This advocacy group for the travel industry promotes fairness, education, integrity and consumer awareness. If you want to start a business in the travel industry, this is an association to consider joining.

The Travel Institute
www.thetravelinstitute.com
 An online community that provides knowledge and insight for all travel professionals.

Travel Industry Association
www.tia.org
 This organization provides representation and leadership for every segment of the travel industry.

Cruise Lines International Association, Inc.
www.cruising.org
 If the cruise market is your interest, consider becoming a member of this association. Its members will show you how to capitalize on this very profitable market.

Outside Sales Support Network (OSSN)
www.ossn.com
 This extensive network provides an incredible array of tools and training to help travel agents succeed in today's fast-paced travel environment.

United States Tour Operators Association
www.ustoa.com
 An organization that promotes integrity and ethical conduct in the tours and vacation packages industry. This is a good organization to join if you want to demonstrate to your clients that you promote your services with the highest levels of professionalism.

U.S. Department of Labor
www.bls.gov/oco/ocos124.htm
 Complete travel agent job specifications and statistics.

CRUISE LINES

Carnival Cruise Lines
www.carnival.com
888.227.6482
 Consumer Web site for fares, schedules and destinations.

Carnival BookCCL.com
www.bookccl.com
 Carnival booking portal designed for travel agents only.

Holland America Line
www.hollandamerica.com
877.724.5425

Consumer Web site for fares, schedules and destinations.

www.hollandamerica.com/show/tahq/home.do

Holland information/booking portal for travel agents only.

Royal Caribbean International
www.royalcarribbean.com
888.689.3940

Consumer Web site for fares, schedules and destinations.

CRUISINGPOWER.COM
www.cruisingpower.com

Travel partners Web site for agents only.

Princess Cruises
www.princess.com
800.774.6237

Consumer Web site for fares, schedules and destinations.

https://book.princess.com/BookingSystem/login.page

Travel agent Web site for exclusive access to cruise resale information.

BUSINESS PLANNING

Meeting Professionals International
www.mpiweb.org
 An online global meeting community that lets its members share knowledge and ideas, build relationships, and explore world marketplaces.

Home Biz Tools
www.homebiztools.com/
 Good advice for starting a home-based business.

U.S. Small Business Administration
www.sba.gov/advo/research/rs235tot.pdf
 Government rules and regulations concerning starting a home-based business.

Minding Her Own Business, 4th Edition
 by Jan Zobel
www.janztax.com
 When it comes to being self-employed and doing taxes, this author knows her business. A must-read for the new business owner.

Internal Revenue Service
www.irs.gov/publications/p587/index.html
 IRS guidelines for business use of your home.

TRAVEL AGENT SCHOOLS

Penn Foster Career School
www.pennfoster.edu/travel/index.html?semkey=Q102038
800.275.4410

If you're serious about becoming a travel agent but have no prior experience, consider taking some courses to learn about the industry.

Joystar
www.joystar.com
800.569.7827
 Another great online school for the budding travel agent.

DIRECT MAIL

United States Postal Service
www.usps.com/directmail/
 Tell the world about your new business using the United States Post Office.

Valpak.com
www.valpak.com
 Another great way to get the word out about your new company.

Millionaire Blueprints neither endorses nor recommends any of the companies listed above. Resources are intended as a starting point for your research.



Photo courtesy of the Puerto Vallarta Tourism Board.