
Profile

CAROLYN PEARSON

Can we start with a little background information? Where are you from?

I'm originally from Pendle in Lancashire, steeped in folklore about witchcraft!

What is your background?

I left school at 16 with relatively few qualifications to work in administration for a beautiful local museum, then worked my way up through a series of jobs before landing a career in IT. I started at the very bottom doing data entry, became a programmer, business analyst, project manager and eventually head of IT for a number of well-known organisations including KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Sony Music, the BBC, ITV and easyJet. I spent six years working in Holland with lots of business travel throughout Europe and India. Alongside working full-time I also collected a degree in Business & IT and an MBA through part-time study.

You currently own and run www.maiden-voyage.com. How did you get the idea of starting maiden-voyage.com in the first place?

It was whilst working at ITV, I had to do a business trip to LA. I really love travelling so I took the weekend before my meetings to shop and see the sights. However when I arrived I was a little overawed by the vastness of the city and slightly nervous about heading out alone at night. There are so many cool places to visit in such a vibrant city but a little bit intimidating to do it all by yourself.

What does maiden-voyage.com do?

I initially started maiden-voyage.com to enable women to connect with each other whilst they were away from home on business, perhaps for dinner or just coffee and a chat with like-minded individuals.

Initially started for individual travellers we've also expanded into corporate membership. Companies such as DLA Piper and Manchester University use maiden-voyage.com so that their colleagues can connect up whilst travelling on business. It's shown that relationships initially developed on a social basis are improving collaboration in the workplace.

Our members soon started to ask us for hotel recommendations so we responded by creating a section on the site for female friendly hotels and started actively inspecting them.

Lots of hotels were falling short of our criteria however, so we developed a training and consultancy practice to really get out there and educate the hospitality sector as to how they can create value and loyalty from female business travellers and of course get them to better look after our members.

What are the main changes you have seen in the time you have been in business?

It's a really exciting business that evolves constantly. We are now being approached by luxury, fashion and beauty brands who want to

engage with our members so we always tie in special offers, discounts and competitions where we can.

I'm also really excited about our global ambassador programme. In 2013 we are aiming to recruit 100 women in 100 cities to be mini-maiden-voyage.coms. These ambassadors will be a contact point in their cities for inbound business travellers, recommending hotels, sharing their "little black books" of great things to do, travel safety and customs, restaurants, hairdressers, nail bars etc.

I love the fact that we can be creative and agile to respond to ideas quickly and simply. I dreamed up the global ambassador programme whilst out for a Sunday walk in the country.

What inspires and motivates you?

Loving what I do! They say "do something you love and you will never work a day in your life" and that is exactly where I am. A day at work for me consists of chatting with inspirational women all around the world, spending time in beautiful hotels, talking to some of my favorite brands and feeding my passion for travelling. It doesn't get any better than this.

What has been the highlight of your career so far and why?

The press! I have to pinch myself when the media such as CNN, BBC, *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* want to cover maiden-voyage.com. They are writing about "little old me and something I developed in my home study".

What are the main challenges facing you at the moment?

Selling! I've gone from being a successful IT leader to somebody who has to develop business to make maiden-voyage.com a sustainable company. When you have created something from scratch it can be hard to communicate its value, I'm told that this is very common especially for women. I'm a scaredy-cat when it comes to rejection so I really need to hone my sales skills or find other people who share my passion about maiden-voyage.com and are able to close a sale.

What advice would you give someone just starting out in business?

Pick something you are genuinely interested and excited about, passion will get you through the tough times and the long hours. Do your research and that doesn't mean ask your friends or family, they will be too kind. Dissect the figures to really understand your business model and be pessimistic with your forecast.

So what's next for Carolyn Pearson? Where do you want to be in 5 years' time?

To have tangibly changed the business travel experience for women globally by influencing the industry to really understand our needs and cater to them. To have the same presence worldwide for maiden-voyage.com as we do in the UK with lots more members, lots more hotels on board and our training programme used globally.



