



Crystal Lambkin, owner of Paragon Travel on Coxwell Avenue in Toronto, has returned to school to learn how to navigate the future of her business. She's had to put her love of travelling on the backburner while she completes her Bachelor of Commerce degree.

DESTINATION: SCHOOL

# Classroom beckons travel agency owner

LINDA WHITE  
Special to QMI Agency

After purchasing Paragon Travel 13 years ago, Crystal Lambkin took a few college courses to learn how to navigate business ownership but 80-hour work weeks left little time for studies. Today, she's en route to earning a certificate in business management and putting newfound lessons to use each day.

"Now that the business is well established and I have a little more time, I decided to return to school to improve the quality of what I do," Lambkin says. She's working towards her certificate at Ryerson University's G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education in Toronto and already has her eye on a Bachelor of Commerce degree.

She has two courses under

her belt: Business Information Systems I and Introductory Financial Accounting.

"On the night of my final accounting exam, I told my instructor that regardless of how well I did in terms of my mark, the best thing about the course is that it has gotten me looking at financial statements.

"I'm paying closer attention to my business because I understand it a lot more. Previously, I focused on clients, sales and marketing, and left much of the finances to my business partner."

The business information systems course has been just as helpful. "I'm paying more attention to the technology aspect of the business. We have a dual strategy of being a traditional travel agency with a storefront and an online business," Lambkin says.

"That class was very helpful in seeing what tools are out

there to improve things like reducing bounce rates on our website and having visitors spend more time on the site by making it more interactive ... I can come up with ideas and talk strategy with our (information technology) people."

Before purchasing Paragon Travel, a business established in 1948, Lambkin followed in her father's footsteps and did a welding apprenticeship. She decided she didn't want to work in a factory, landed a job at a travel agency and after six months, went into business for herself.

Returning to school earlier this year presented another huge learning curve as Lambkin tackled things like how to complete assignments online.

She's also had to put her love of travelling on the backburner. "You have to be disciplined and committed to putting in the time. You need to

make some sacrifices and cut down on some activities in order to give school the focus it needs."

She welcomes the support she has received. "I tell everybody that I'm going back to school and the support has been incredible," Lambkin says. "It's surprising how many people have gone back to school as adults, which is very encouraging."

Most encouraging is the impact returning to school is already having on her business.

"It's about adding value to clients who are so much more informed," Lambkin says.

"We position ourselves as being the trusted adviser. You can get tons of information on the Internet; what you can't get is trusted advice," she says.

"I'm happy that what I'm learning is relevant to my business. It makes sense and I can apply it immediately."