

# Pink personifies passion for travel business

23 years experience pays off in people business



**A**lan Pink, vice president of Burgess CanPlan Travel Group, leans back in his chair behind his desk in his sunny office in the back of an old slate blue Victorian on Brenton Street in Halifax.

The sleeves of his blue-and-white striped shirt are rolled up. He's probably been at work since 7 a.m., his usual time. He wears a discrete head phone. He's a personable man in his late 40s, with dark hair, glasses and a moustache.

Mr. Pink's been in the travel business for 23 years. He was with CanPlan when it merged with Burgess in 1999. He considers the combined enterprise an independent, old travel agency based on client loyalty and referrals, even though it has seven offices with annual sales of about \$20 million.

"You have to be passionate if you're in the travel business, because you're dealing with people, you're dealing with feelings," Mr. Pink says. "Given all that's happened, especially since September 11th, and you're not passionate, you shouldn't be in the business, because this then will become a job."

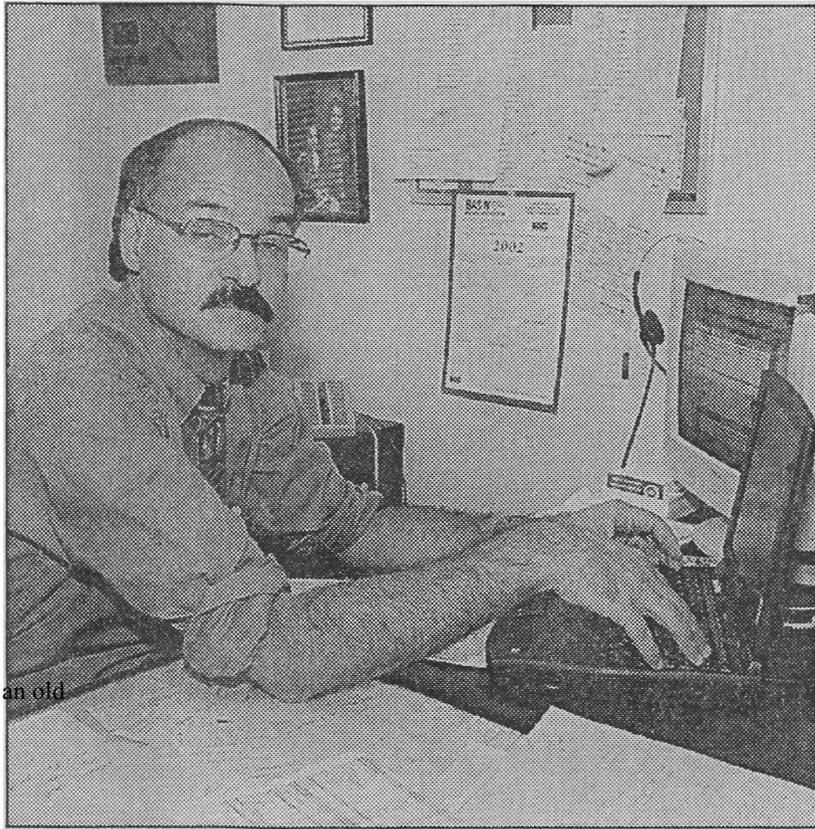
Mr. Pink tells a story of customer service that paid off.

"It's back in the CanPlan days, around 15 years ago," he says. "A guy comes in at noontime. I'll never forget it. It was a miserable day outside. It, was in Febraiv. He was a doctor at the VG.

"I'm the only one available, everybody else is busy." The guy says, "I already have my airline tickets, so all I need is four rooms at this small hotel [in France], so I said "when are you going?"

"He said, \*next Monday.' "Let's say today was Tuesday. He's going Monday. You couldn't fax it because you didn't have a fax machine, much less e-mail. So what do you do, you can't write them, because you'll never hear back in time."

"I picked up the phone. I called directory assistance for France, for this small hotel, called the Beaulier



Uilly P. Bleil Photography

**Alan Pink** is vice president of Burgess CanPlan Travel Group, Halifax.

Hotel, and luckily enough, I got somebody who could speak English. I was on the phone for 10 minutes. I booked tire four rooms."

So Mr. Pink shushes him toward the door, and the guy says "I don't understand something." "I said, 'what don't you understand?' "I've been dealing with another travel agency.' "He'd just come from there on his way back to the VG and he spotted us."

"How could you get the rooms just that fast?" he said. I just came back from [the other agency] and just told the girl 'the hell with it,' 'She's been trying for two months to get these rooms and hasn't been able to get them and you picked up the phone and you get it done in 10 minutes.'"

Mr. Pink said, "you're going next week. What choice do I have? There's no other way to do it. So the guy said "you're not getting any commission on the airline tickets, because the other agency did those; this is a small hotel that probably doesn't even pay commissions. Let me at least pay you for the phone call."

"I was just in a hurry to get rid of him, I had stuff to do. I said, jokingly, 'Nah, that's okay. Don't worry about it. HI get you next time.'"

"Now he's calmed down and he's happy. He's got his rooms. He says "what do you mean, next time? How do you know there will be a next time?"

"I said 'You got done in 10 minutes what you couldn't get in two months. You'll be back.' He's become one of my better clients ever since and a good personal friend, not to mention, he's a doctor at the VG. He has a big

circle of friends and they all come to me. So again, it's the same with any business. If you go a little above and beyond and do something for somebody, they'll always remember."

Mr. Pink says the travel business is also a difficult business.

"People think all we do is sell holidays," he says. "But the thing is, we also arrange travel where somebody's died in the family. It's just not all smiles, and cruises and laying on the beach somewhere in the Caribbean.

"I had a guy who went to Florida, an older man, the only family he had was a brother here in Halifax. The guy goes to Florida by himself, has a heart attack, dies. The maid goes in, finds the guy dead in bed. They didn't know who to call, but they found the ticket jacket with our phone number on the back, so they called us."

Mr. Pink called the brother in Halifax, who had just had open heart surgery, and gave him the bad news and helped make funeral arrangements.

"You have to be compassionate," he says. "You gotta, because it's a people business." In terms of bereavement travel, "it happens a lot, probably twice a week," he says.

"People have to go. And they can't handle it. They can't think now, because they're upset And they don't even know what they need or where to begin."

But the next minute, "I've had people that come in here that are laughing and smiling all over because they just came back from a wonderful cruise. So, that's nice and rewarding."