

STEPHEN SCOTT | FEBRUARY 10, 2021 2:14 PM ET

Why the Travel Industry Needs More Black Travel Advisors



Senior couple getting a professional consultation (photo via kate_sept2004 / Getty Images)

The [tourism industry](#) in the United States has been devastated across the board. The emergence of each sector from the grips of this outbreak will mean we are going to change from a reduction mode to a hiring mode in ways we haven't seen before. With so many segments affected, we have the opportunity to evaluate and action plans to attract, hire, and keep a diverse range of travel advisors.

Specifically, [Black travel advisors](#) need to be a focus for this opportunity because of the benefits they bring to the industry, our agencies, and our customers. My focus right now is to deliver the tough thoughts on diversity for the growth of our industry, post-pandemic, so that we are successful.

As a former business development manager at a major cruise line, I spent day after day visiting amazing individual travel advisors at their kitchen tables, all the way up to large group presentations throughout New York City. My first-hand experience with this meant that I could see the makeup of who was in the agencies, and who was being hired.

It was reflected in my colleagues as well. Almost as if hiring was designed to match the agency demographics, which then matched the customer demographics. It's a circle that is not easily broken, and if it is broken, it's a one-off situation. When we come back from the pandemic, will the hiring match what we had before? Or will it emerge with a fresh new outlook on hiring talent? If agencies hire more black advisors, will suppliers change too?

Stephen Scott



Stephen Scott is the CEO of Travel Hub 365 & the Odyssey Travel App which is a Chicago, Illinois-based tech-enabled premium travel platform that aims to democratize access to luxury hotels, car rental, and other travel services directly from the provider to the user. The company has been in the travel agency business for several years and is now layering in a tech component to streamline the booking experience as well as open distribution channels for these luxury services that have previously been opaque and limited. A native of Chicago, Stephen grew up in the travel industry as his parents owned and operated a travel agency for 7 years. After studying Sales and Marketing at DeVry University, Stephen began his career in Corporate Sales at United Airlines in 2004. His accomplishments working with United's high profile corporate and TMC accounts led him to the cruise industry in 2009 with an opportunity in Miami & NYC for Royal Caribbean International that spanned 5 years, wherein 2015, he earned the Chairman's Award for top sales performance. For reservations or inquiries please visit www.travelhub365.com.

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population, and then finally the suppliers. If Black advisors are forced to only work at Black-owned travel agencies, because they are not getting hired at the bigger agencies, then that revenue stays within those Black agencies or goes directly to the supplier.

How do we address this situation? I used to give brand presentations for new hires on half a dozen occasions, and as a person in my mid-30's it was great to see all the new young people being hired, but I would see at most one out of 20 new hires that were Black, if any.

It's reflected in large luxury travel shows as well. It is starting to not shock me when someone says to me, "Oh, I assumed you were a supplier. You are an advisor?" We have very few black-owned agencies in luxury consortia's, and few leaders that make the speaker stages at these events because of hiring practices.

That is a large part of the problem. We are relying on our own networks, and not the vast amount of talent in our colleges, other industries and our customer base. Now that I am an agency owner myself, I can relate to the challenges we have in hiring capable, and trustworthy talent, so keeping things close to the chest is valid.

But our ability to reduce friction to hiring a Black travel advisor is a major step. We need to reduce friction once Black professionals are in the organization so that we can reduce the friction between the types of customers we attract and uncover missing revenue opportunities. It's not always about how hard you are looking, it's also about how hard you're working to not hire a Black travel advisor when the opportunity comes.

This is not simply an entry-level situation either; it has to come from the top as well. We have seen a dozen leaders hired over the last few months of the pandemic, and only one or two have been Black. Is that pace going to continue? Some of the best leaders in our industry are Black. They did not all come from within our agency ranks. But they are highly successful, and great at what they do. Don't miss out on your opportunity to re-emerge from this downturn by not hiring the best talent you can find because the friction to hiring a black travel advisor, manager, or leader exists within your agency or network.

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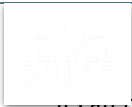
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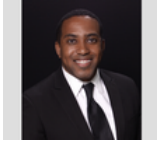
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...can be. Let's grow our industry back in a great way and use this as an opportunity to do it better. I'll do my part, will you?

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