

# THE TALENT BUSINESS

PUTTING DIVERSITY & INCLUSION  
AT THE HEART OF THE EXECUTIVE SEARCH PROCESS

JULY 2020

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**The Talent Business (TTB)** is a world leading executive search firm specializing in transformative leadership in the marketing and communications space for businesses powered by innovation and creativity.

In the constantly changing environment in which our clients operate, we expedite and de-risk the complex process of making successful hires geared to business transformation.

For several years we have been highlighting the importance of Diversity & Inclusion in powering innovation and creativity, the key drivers of business transformation and commercial success. Delivering talent from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences has been a priority for TTB and a business imperative for our client partners.

We recognize that while we've made progress, we know it's not enough. We must do more and specifically address the inequalities facing Black, Indigenous & People of Color in our industry (acronym BIPOC in the US/acronym BAME in other markets). Now is the moment to **move from advocacy to a more activist approach** by enhancing how we support our clients in driving sustainable cultural change, and by holding ourselves accountable for doing so from this moment forward. We do not underestimate the challenges ahead of us. Our activist approach seeks to undo behaviours that represent the cumulative effect of decades of systemic racism within society as a whole, and within the creative industries.

Having carefully assessed the challenges we face, TTB has initiated a series of additional practices designed to ensure that Diversity & Inclusion are at the heart of our search process and every search that we handle, so that our clients are **optimally placed to hire diverse talent** with the requisite skills, and that those critical hires thrive, impact business and stay longterm.

We believe our approach to executive search will give our clients a competitive advantage, by securing and retaining diverse leadership and senior talent that will drive business transformation and deliver sustainable commercial success.

This is a moral and commercial imperative.

**Automation is the enemy of Diversity and Inclusion.** This applies to both technical automation, where key word search and algorithms serve to reinforce bias, and practical automation where there is a default to established processes while hoping for new outcomes.

Our approach to executive search is to combine data driven insight with relationship building, for depth based understanding. What we outline here has a specific BIPOC focus built from the bedrock foundations we know to be the positive drivers of Diversity & Inclusion elsewhere such as gender discrimination. These measures will increase the numbers of BIPOC represented at the more senior level in the businesses that we partner with, by prescribing a proactive, high touch process that **delivers an employer brand experience that will attract and secure diverse talent.**

We're also prescribing measures to ensure that our clients set BIPOC hires up for success. These measures are based on our experience of seeing diverse hires fail because people were expected to adapt themselves to fit into the existing norm and the failure to recognize that **inclusion is not the same as assimilation.**

TTB has identified **five key areas where new enhanced protocols can optimize the process of diverse hiring** and set the foundation for ongoing inclusion:

1. Job Description
2. Candidate Mapping / Sourcing
3. Outreach
4. Interview Process
5. Process Analysis

In the long term, success will be predicated on the basis that systemic cultural change will have been affected in our industry. At this time, however, success in driving that change will be predicated on the understanding that an inclusive recruitment process starts as early as the writing of a job description and continues throughout the entirety of the hiring process and beyond.

## 1. JOB DESCRIPTION:

It is not enough to state active support of diversity in a job description. BIPOC have long been made weary and wary of tokenism, having experienced being **hired for optics rather than for their skills and diverse experience.**

To be a credible option for anyone from a diverse background **you need to be clear why at a systemic level you are committed to making a diverse hire.** Job descriptions must substantiate why diversity matters or risk getting lost in the wash of others claiming the same, or worse be viewed as a micro-aggression, a recurrent experience for BIPOC when approached by businesses who lack understanding.

Job descriptions can trigger code-switching, the practice of changing behaviors, look and mannerisms to fit in. TTB will advise clients on how to mitigate this to ensure that, as the process advances, interviews are authentic and not compromised by a job description that may unconsciously re-enforce bias.

TTB will also advise its clients on the avoidance of selection criteria which can make whiteness an unstated credential.

## 2. CANDIDATE MAPPING / SOURCING:

TTB delivers **fully inclusive and transparent mapping ensuring equitable representation.**

- ▶ Our global policy of having **no 'off-limits'** ensures that research is comprehensive, capturing and assessing the extended universe of potential candidates for any given role, leaving no stone unturned.
- ▶ TTB's global network leveraged on all searches to ensure confident / comprehensive capture of all potential candidates.
- ▶ **We look beyond the usual pool of talent** leveraging our broad business sector and category experience to identify hybrid talent with transferable skills relevant for the businesses that we partner.
  - ▶ Most of our searches globally are for businesses looking to harness innovation and creativity to drive business transformation, whether these be brand owners, technology platforms, consultancies or communications agency partners.

To address the issue of **perceived lack of pipeline of qualified candidates** at the senior level TTB provides an evaluation of transferable skills with recommendations on how to maximize flex on qualification when it comes to defining and capturing the universe of qualified candidates.

- ▶ To aide our client's ability to evaluate candidates from backgrounds where the companies they have worked for are likely less known or unknown, candidate assessment will couple with additional context and background on the businesses they are and have worked for.
- ▶ Data presented on size and scale of businesses and commercial impact of initiatives to help counteract where institutional bias, both conscious and unconscious, has a tendency to play a negative role.
  - ▶ e.g. individual candidate's experience negatively perceived based on perceptions of candidate's employer brand, rather than on the basis of an objective evaluation of candidate's experience and achievements.
- ▶ Core competency evaluation that indicates readiness to step up to a more senior role.

### 3. OUTREACH:

Black Lives Matter is driving international commitment to addressing systemic racism. Our industry has come out in force pledging to change and this has sparked a **BIPOC talent gold rush**.

We are already hearing anecdotes from our network of approaches being made solely based on racial profiling with no evidence of why an opportunity might be worth considering.

**BIPOC candidates are skeptical.** Recruiters and their clients need to evidence a clear advocacy strategy built from a closely considered job description and be grounded in a deep understanding of the business and the role. Doing this, will drive commitment to Diversity & Inclusion that endures beyond the current news cycle.

## 4. INTERVIEW PROCESS:

Research has shown that businesses who make statements about valuing diversity fare no better than those who don't when it comes to their track record of assessing resumes.

TTB advise how to assess resumes so clients **do not miss out on meeting transformational talent due to perceived lack of fit.**

In order to achieve an authentic process we work with clients to spot resume whitening and how to evaluate this relative to resumes from all other candidates. We will also work with candidates to counsel against the need to resume whiten for clients we know to be genuinely motivated to remove this bias from their process.

Additionally, TTB will advise on the interview panel and employer brand experience in a Diversity & Inclusion context. We thoroughly prepare both candidate and interviewer at each stage with guidance on how to be aware of code switching.

TTB monitors feedback to identify issues with perceived 'fit'.

Before a client moves to offer, TTB will make recommendations on what successful onboarding would be required for the long-term success of that hire.

TTB will guide formal referencing to mitigate the bias prevalent here where informal, anecdotal 'friend network' referencing may reinforce biased notions of competencies and cultural fit.

## 5. PROCESS ANALYSIS:

This process **establishes a diverse culture from the outset and fosters inclusion.**

However, for TTB the process **does not end with the placement.** In order to continue to **optimize and ensure ongoing accountability** we share the following feedback with our clients:

- ▶ **Analysis** of BIPOC presented and considered at each stage of the process.
- ▶ **Feedback** on the process from exit interviews conducted with a sample of candidates interviewed but who did not go on to be placed.
- ▶ **Feedback** from the successful candidate on the process.
- ▶ **A follow-up of feedback** from the successful candidate 3 months, 6 months and a year after placement to review level of successful inclusion.

### **The Commitment:**

Real, sustainable change that powers businesses in transformational ways comes not from automation but from committing to make the time, from attention to detail, and from awareness that systemic change will be born not from proclamation and token gestures, but from conversation and engagement that leads to sustained action. By equipping our clients in this way, we commit to creating a partnership framework that will enable this work to progress and change to happen.