



Travel Counsellors – Key Personnel

David Speakman, Group Chairman, Travel Counsellors Ltd

David Speakman was the original pioneer of the travel agents working from home concept. He founded Travel Counsellors, which was the first - and is also the largest - travel home-working company in the world, in 1994.

At that time he had already been in the travel industry for 15 years, operating a chain of retail travel agents in North West England.

David was inspired by a book by American trend guru Faith Popcorn which predicted a rise in the number of people shopping and working from home. This gave him the idea for a new kind of travel agency: one where people would book their holidays from the comfort of their own home. Even better, the new company would have low overheads because all its agents would also work from home and their income would be commission based.

Since those early days Travel Counsellors Ltd has enjoyed phenomenal success. While the rest of the industry battles against the internet, it continues to enjoy phenomenal growth due to its emphasis on service, rather than price. It now has over 1,000 agents in the UK and overseas.

Under David's stewardship the company continues to be one of the biggest innovators in the travel industry. In 2003 the company was presented with the Queen's Award for Enterprise, the UK's highest business accolade.

David is also an ardent champion of the customer. It was his vision that saw Travel Counsellors UK launch a Financial Trust to guarantee all client money in 2004 and he has spoken at a number of high profile seminars on customer service. Recognition of his high standing in the travel industry came in 2006 when he was one of the first recipients of the prestigious travel industry Lifetime Achievement Awards. He has also been given the honour of induction into The British Travel Industry Hall of Fame 2008 in recognition of his innovations and achievements within the travel industry.



Steve Byrne, Group Managing Director, Travel Counsellors Ltd

Steve Byrne joined Travel Counsellors Ltd as managing director in October 2004, moving from his previous position as chief executive of a UK based luxury tour operator.

Steve is spearheading the development of Travel Counsellors from a UK travel agency to an international travel company and the business now operates in the UK, Ireland, USA, Netherlands, Australia, South Africa and Canada. Under his leadership, the Travel Counsellors management team has also driven the continued growth of Travel Counsellors through:

- increasing the number of counsellors;
- introducing a ground breaking franchise agreement;
- launching the Travel Counsellors Training Academy which offers a Travel Counsellors franchise for professionals from outside of the travel industry;
- reducing agent turnover levels to the lowest in the industry; and
- developing Travel Counsellors from a travel agency to wholesaler with greater control over product and gross margin.

Before joining ITC in 1998, Steve spent five years as principal consultant at KPMG Management Consulting.

A chartered accountant, with a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) from Henley Management College, Steve graduated from the University of York with an honours degree in Politics, Economics and History.



Paul Speakman, Group IT Director, Travel Counsellors Ltd

Travel Counsellors was an innovator in its original idea of having the very best travel consultants in the business working from home, linked to head office, by technology.

Since then it has been seen as a leader in its use of technology not just within the travel industry, but within the business community generally. Indeed in 2005 the company was the winner of the technology category of the prestigious CBI Growing Business Awards.

Paul joined Travel Counsellors in 1998 and now heads a team of over 30 IT staff including seven people on helpdesk and 16 developers. The Company's award winning technology is at the very heart of the business, benefiting each and every one of the company's head office staff as well as home-based Counsellors in almost every aspect of their work.

Paul developed and implemented the company intranet which helps the Company's agents keep in touch with each other and up to date with important company news. This, together with other technology such as the remote call centre, an advanced contact management program, webcam technology and the Phenix dynamic packaging system has won several technology awards in the travel industry. His role covers all aspects of IT within the company both in the established UK operation and the new ventures internationally.

After gaining a BSc in Mathematics & Management from the University of Nottingham, Paul went on to attain an MSc in Information Systems from the University of Leeds. Before joining Travel Counsellors in October 1998 Paul worked for a Leeds based software house.

Derek Lorton, Financial Director, Travel Counsellors Ltd

Derek joined Travel Counsellors Ltd in August 2001 as financial controller and was promoted to financial director in December 2003.

Responsible for monitoring all areas of accounts and financing, one of Derek's key tasks is to make sure the company produces accurate daily, monthly and annual reports allowing it not only to satisfy the auditors but also to monitor performance internally. Turnover at Travel Counsellors is £245 million this year and the rapid growth makes accurate forecasting and budgeting a vital part of the job.

Derek was also closely involved with the creation of the Travel Counsellors Trust, which is audited independently by the Barclays Bank Trust Company and guarantees all customer monies in the event of a supplier failure. Other responsibilities include banking, insurance, and liaising with ABTA and the Civil Aviation Authority.

Derek originally qualified with the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants in 1981 and has worked as financial controller for several large firms including Rathbones Bakery and furniture companies Allermuir and FMS.



Kirsten Hughes, Commercial Director, Travel Counsellors Ltd

Travel Counsellors prides itself on the fact that it is completely independent and can offer its customers the widest choice of advice available. This means Kirsten's role of building and maintaining an excellent relationship with the company's suppliers – which number over 400 - is crucial.

Kirsten is the key point of contact with tour operators, airlines and hotels along with other suppliers including car rental firms, insurance companies and telecoms companies. An important part of her job is to negotiate the best possible commission deals for Travel Counsellors – particularly important as the income of its agents is based wholly on the commission they receive from bookings, which are split with the company.

Kirsten originally joined Travel Counsellors at the beginning of 1995. From her original role as travel consultant, she was promoted to telesales manager in 1997 before being made commercial manager in mid 2000. She was then being promoted to her current position of Commercial Director in November 2004.

Prior to joining Travel Counsellors, Kirsten worked for two years as a travel consultant for Lunn Poly, before which she worked in the accounts department of the Courtaulds group.

Malcolm Hingley, Sales Director, Travel Counsellors Ltd

Malcolm joined Travel Counsellors in 2002, but has worked in the travel industry ever since leaving school at 18.

Previous roles have included working as a regional sales manager for Hogg Robinson, general manager at Going Places and business development manager for First Choice owned Travel Choice.

He joined Travel Counsellors in June 2002 as training manager, becoming head of sales the following year before being promoted yet again to sales director in January 2004. His responsibilities include the motivation, training, sales development and customer relationship management of the company's 1,000 plus agents



Karen Morris, Operations Director, Travel Counsellors Ltd

Part of the original Travel Counsellors team, Karen was presented with the David Speakman award at the 2003 Travel Counsellors conference in recognition of 20 years of loyal service.

Karen originally joined Speakman Travel in Atherton 25 years ago as a travel consultant. She was also part of the original Travel Counsellors team when the company was founded back in 1994, working her way up the ranks before being promoted to her current position of operations director in December 2001.

Karen has a pivotal role within the company coordinating operations in the UK and overseas. She is responsible for meeting the resource needs and appropriate skill sets of every department in order to support the 1,000 plus Travel Counsellors and ensure the smooth running of a growing international business.

Cathy Burke, General Manager, Travel Counsellors Ireland

Cathy Burke joined Travel Counsellors in September 2005 and is responsible for co-ordinating and leading the company's expansion in Ireland, reporting to Group Managing Director Steve Byrne.

Travel Counsellors was the first travel company to introduce the concept of experienced travel consultants working from home to Ireland. Cathy's experience made her the obvious candidate to spearhead this expansion - she has worked in the Irish travel industry for 30 years, where she is an extremely well known and popular figure.

Previously she combined the role of co-ordinator for Worldchoice Ireland with running her own travel consultancy business - Cathy Burke TMC - which has worked for clients including the Irish Travel Agents Association, the Irish Brokers Association and Hyatt Hotels.



William Puk, General Manager, Travel Counsellors, South Africa

William Puk is responsible for the day-to-day leading and running of Travel Counsellors South Africa.

William was born in the U.K and began his career within the airline industry, where he spent 19 years with British Caledonian Airways and British Airways. He was posted to Cape Town by British Airways in 1988 and three years later he joined large Cape Town based agency, ITC Travel as Managing Director.

William joined Travel Counsellors in April 2007 as General Manager. Prior to this he was Managing Director of Sure Travel, a consortium of travel agents, for 12 years within which he grew and developed the company into a successful franchise group.

William is also a well known personality within the South African travel industry, having contributed regularly to travel industry columns and holding various regional positions within The Association of South African Travel Agents (ASATA).

Fred van Eijk, General Manager Travel Counsellors Nederland BV & Travel Counsellors Deutschland GmbH

Fred has been employed by Travel Counsellors since November 2005, prior to which he worked with the company for several months on a consultancy basis.

Reporting to Group Managing Director Steve Byrne, Fred is tasked with spearheading Travel Counsellor's expansion into Netherlands and Germany and has previously held a number of senior roles in the European travel industry.

Before joining Travel Counsellors he was chief executive for the Qatar Tourism Authority and member of the board for the Qatar National Hotels Company, prior to which he was chief executive of MyTravel's Benelux operations. Before joining MyTravel, Fred was London-based Managing Director of Flying Colours plc. Other previous roles include international travel trade director and more recently board member, for Forte and Le Meridien Hotels.

A fellow member of the Institute of Travel and Tourism (ITT), Fred is a member of the advisory board of the Dutch CHN University for Professional Education in Tourism and Leisure and is a frequent columnist in the country's leading travel trade magazine Reed's Reisrevue. He is the founder and chairman of the registered children's charity Helping Hands.