

# The Network Journal

Black Professionals and S

**PR'S War With Itself  
Over Ethnically  
Diverse Senior Talent**

**Producer Brian A.  
Moreland on  
Black Talent  
on Broadway**

# IMPACT!

**Bringing  
color to  
“a sea  
of white  
faces”**

**Kim L. Hunter**  
Founder/  
President/CEO,  
LAGRANT  
COMMUNICATIONS;  
Founder/  
Chairman,  
The LAGRANT  
Foundation (TLF);  
Founder/Managing  
Partner, KLH  
& Associates

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#### **Leadership in Diversity: Kim L. Hunter, Maverick**

In 2015, Kim L. Hunter shook the public relations industry with a letter to the leadership of the country's top PR agencies that questioned their commitment to ethnic diversity. Declaring that chief diversity and inclusion officer positions "mask" the "old way of thinking to make the outside world believe [the agencies] care about diversity and inclusion, when it's obvious that they don't," he asked, "Where are the African-American male general managers, practice chairs, and regional presidents?" President and CEO of LAGRANT Communications Inc., chairman and CEO of The LAGRANT Foundation (TLF) and managing partner of KLH & Associates, Hunter is a diversity maverick. In an exclusive one-on-one with me, he reflects on his 36-year battle to inject color into the "sea of white faces" dominating PR's leadership.

— By Rosalind McLymont



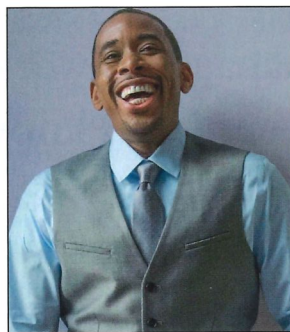
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## Racial Diversity

Will we ever see an end game?

TNJ's Leadership in Diversity edition this year turns its attention to public relations, an industry at war with itself over its historical dominance by white males. Over brunch at Sarabeth's in New York City more than a year ago, Helen Shelton, senior partner at Finn Partners, spoke to me passionately of the industry's diversity problem and what Finn and the Public Relations Society of America — the industry's largest trade association — are doing to help fix it. Significant strides are being made and agencies are becoming increasingly mindful and forward thinking in their hiring practices, cultural environments, and equity in compensation and benefits for all, but diversity and inclusion remain issues to contend with, she acknowledges, insisting that "championing diversity in communications is not just something we must do, it is something we should live each day."

Featured on our cover is PR/communications maverick Kim L. Hunter, who lives diversity each day through his firms, LAGRANT Communications and KLH & Associates, and through the foundation he established, The LAGRANT Foundation (TLF). "Where are the African-American men that report to the CEOs?" Kim asked in 2015 in a scathing group letter to the CEOs of the country's top agencies, addressing each CEO by name. The letter reportedly caused "an uproar" in the industry. Such is the impact of the man.

For Blacks, being "a diversity problem" is wearying — and humiliating. This country's attempts to fix this problem have swung from the Reconstruction era's short-lived Forty Acres and a Mule policy, separate but equal, civil rights, integration, and equal employment opportunity to affirmative action, diversity, and diversity-and-inclusion—all in vain. Racism gets to you, no matter how hard you try to ignore its overt and subtle insults; no matter how tall you walk in the truth of your history, beauty and competence; no matter what comfort you derive from trusting that the universe ultimately will fix it for good, or that the higher they build their walls, the taller you can and will grow. It gets to you, this relentless assault on your existence just because of the color of your skin, even when you are "fifteen on a scale of one to ten," as Claudine Moore of C. Moore Media says in our Industry Focus on page 10.

This summer I experienced the indescribable joy of taking my two U.S.-born grandchildren to the country of my birth, Guyana. I wanted them to see, hear, smell and feel a country that partly bears their roots, a country of mostly dark-skinned people who are not kicked in the spirit day after day because of their dark skin. I wanted to expose them to that utterly liberating feeling of being rooted in the realness of such a country. And I jubilantly envision their having that feeling again and again as they travel to the other countries of their roots — the Democratic Republic of Congo and Jamaica.

From our reporting for our annual Leadership in Diversity editions, it's clear that an end to the centuries-long fight for racial equity is nowhere in sight, despite the valiant efforts of many committed souls.

Are Blacks and other people of color destined to remain a diversity problem? Is a United States without racial bias possible? Will we ever see a racial diversity end game?



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# LEADERSHIP

Kim L.  
Hunter

a life of

# IMPACT

By Rosalind McLymont

**I**n February 2015, PR Week published a letter to the leadership of some of the country's top public relations agencies that rattled that industry as never before. Penned by Kim L. Hunter, founder, president and CEO of LAGRANT COMMUNICATIONS, chairman and CEO of The LAGRANT Foundation (TLF) and managing partner of KLH & Associates, the letter took aim at a status quo in which people of color, especially African-American males, were not seen in senior leadership roles. It challenged the CEOs of the Top10 agencies to recruit, train and develop ethnically diverse candidates on the senior executive level.

"Throughout my career, I've often walked the halls of some of the top ten PR agencies and among the sea of white faces I was not able to find one African-American male who served on the global senior leadership team," Hunter wrote.

Three years after the publication of his letter, Hunter still does not see the change he hoped for. "The industry lacks courage. I thought that by now — in the 28 years that I've been really sounding alarm bells — there would be significant changes today. There's no African-American, Hispanic or Native American running a top campaign. That, to me, is a very big disappointment," he said in a recent interview with *The Network Journal*.

Hunter is recognized as one of the PR industry's strongest advocates of diversity and inclusion. "You



# IN DIVERSITY

can't have one instead of the other. It's both," he declares.

His speech is fast, filled with the assuredness of more than three decades of corporate and agency experience in advertising, marketing and public relations. He speaks wistfully, too. "What gives me hope and courage is that the younger generation is poised to question and take action, to make a difference."

## THE BEGINNING

Making a difference drove Hunter, at 28, to leave his position as executive director/ general manager at International Communications & Advertising Network (ICAN) in Los Angeles in 1990 and launch LAGRANT COMMUNICATIONS. "I saw the power of the media and I realized I could have influence on changing a perception, particularly of ethnically diverse people," he remarks.

By then he had traversed the country from his native Pennsylvania to obtain a bachelor's degree in business administration at the University of Washington in Seattle; delved into market research at Baxter International Inc. in Los Angeles; and then to the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, for a master's degree in international management.

He built LAGRANT with social marketing campaigns around HIV/AIDS, infant mortality, teenage pregnancy and anti-smoking issues, launching the first HIV/AIDS campaign for minority women at the height of the AIDS epidemic. These were deeply personal issues. "A lot of this thinking on my part extended from my life as a young boy growing up in Philadelphia. I was one of eleven children, and these issues impacted my brothers, my sisters — family. One of my brothers had so many kids before he was an adult so a woman's reproductive health was very important to me," Hunter reveals.

Today, LAGRANT is a multi-million-dollar, multi-award-winning integrated marketing communications agency whose clients include Verizon, Lenovo, Carnival Corp., Starbucks, Covered California and American Heart Association. "I have four initiatives: education; health care, arts and culture, and conservation. I work hard; I have long hours, long days, but I've always accepted that as part of the equation, if you want to be successful, if you want to be happy you have to work at it. It's part of my DNA," Hunter states.

Growing the firm in today's technology-driven environment is his biggest challenge now. "When I started, the market was television, radio and magazines. Today, digital and the social media channels of communication are unequivocally very important components of the market," Hunter says. "I never said I would master any of these things, but I have a good understanding of the mechanics."

## THE FOUNDATION

Executing award-winning campaigns on behalf of clients was not enough for a man frustrated by the "sea of white faces" in his industry.

"All you have to do is open your eyes and you see the lack of diversity and inclusion in the industry," Hunter laments. "I'm not one to bitch and moan. I'm one to take action. So I sat down with my attorney and partners and told them what I wanted to do. My attorney said, 'you know you'll have to set up a new entity.' And that's when I created the foundation."



Kim L. Hunter (far right) with recipients of The LAGRANT Foundation (TLF) scholarships, at the foundation's 20th Anniversary Scholarship & Donor Recognition Reception in New York City in May.

It is here that Hunter sees his greatest impact. Celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, The LAGRANT Foundation (TLF) prepares Black, Native Americans, Asian American, Pacific Islanders and Hispanic/Latino undergraduate and graduate students for careers in the communications industry by providing them scholarships, mentoring, career development and internships. To date it counts 511 scholarship winners and more than \$2.38 million awarded from money raised primarily through its corporate and nonprofit board members.

"You should be very proud of the difference you're making," Gail Heimann, president of global PR firm Weber Shandwick and a member of TLF's board of directors, wrote to Hunter after attending the 20th anniversary celebration in New York.

For Hunter, the foundation is truly a pipeline. "I'm passionate about the mission. I'm mission-driven. So if you're mission-driven, understand the dynamics of the marketplace, and can talk to your partners about a direct correlation between their interests and the enterprise's return on investment [the partners will support the enterprise]," he explains. "The intent is ROI. It's not just





Founding principles of the LAGRANT brand:  
*Honesty, Authenticity, Kindness,  
 Tenacity, Thoughtfulness, Creativity,  
 Innovativeness*

about giving money to a not-for-profit.”

Still impatient to see ethnically diverse professionals in upper ranks, Hunter six years ago established KLH & Associates, a multicultural executive search firm specializing in placing mid-to-senior-level marketing, public relations and advertising talent with Fortune 500 companies and communication agencies. “My work speaks for itself,” he says of the firm’s success.

## PUBLIC SERVICE

Hunter has an active public service life that aligns with his commitment to improving the lives of others. “I have no doubt that my public service has rounded out my portfolio,” he says. “I’m very active politically. I believe in being politically astute, in the impact of public-private partnerships. I believe both the government and the private sector can be instrumental in making people’s lives better.”

Appointed by mayors Tom Bradley and Richard Riordan, he served on the City of Los Angeles’s Cultural Affairs Commission and the Animal Services Commission, respectively. He taught Diversity and the Media at California State University, Northridge, for three academic years as an adjunct professor. While engaged as vice president of marketing and communications for the American Cancer Society from 1995 to

1998, he spent 1993 to 1995 as vice chair of the Great Beginning For Black Babies Task Force, an initiative he helped launch to counter the high infant mortality rate among Black teenage mothers. “White girls had a higher incidence of teenage pregnancy but they were having healthy babies. African-American teenagers had a lower incidence of pregnancy but they were not giving birth to healthy babies,” he remarks.

## LEGACY

Hunter is the recipient of public relations’ highest awards and recognition, including The Holmes Report’s Individual Achievement SABRE Award and recognition among In2’s “Innovator 25”; Arthur W. Page Society’s Distinguished Service Award; and *PRWeek*’s PR Professional of the Year-Agency Honorable Mention, Diversity Distinction in PR Award, “The 50 Most Powerful People in PR” recognition each year from 2012 to this year, and induction into its 2017 Hall of Fame. He was admitted to the 2018 FBI Citizens Academy, and he’s a fellow of the National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD), the highest level of credentialing for corporate directors and corporate governance professionals. One of his “biggest joys” of starting TLF is Jessica Shih, director of strategic

communications at Blue Shield of California and the first scholarship alumna to join the foundation’s board. Shih won a TLF scholarship as a senior at University of California-Los Angeles 19 years ago. The relationship she has maintained with the foundation since then facilitated her appointment to her current position, as well as to her previous position as communications director at Verizon.

And there’s Keisha Brown, executive vice president of LAGRANT COMMUNICATIONS and chair of the company’s Health and Wellness Practice. She has worked with the company for 23 of its 28 years — her only job, started between her junior and senior years at Howard University. There’s also a former employee who became chief communications officer at Seattle Genetics.

“This is my pride and joy— seeing the fruit of labor come to fruition,” Hunter beams.

He is adamant about not retiring from his businesses or championing diversity. “I may cut back on hours. There are slow changes, but not the change I would have expected,” he says. “I would want the world to know that I have had an impact on young people’s lives, where they saw the possibility they probably would not have seen otherwise and moved forward to do what they want to do.”

TNI