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Black businesses need more business from black conventions and I am going to try to help them get it. How? By writing and speaking out on the subject.

Thriving businesses, more than jobs or anything else, are the main reason communities stay viable, grow, and prosper. (Jobs - service type and managerial - feed people, but it's businesses that make and stabilize neighborhoods and communities.) Small wonder then that the black community - which has more subsidized housing projects, free health clinics, city run recreation centers and non-profit day care corporations than it does businesses - is barely surviving.

How do downtown establishments stay in business and make money? With the help of their convention and visitors bureau, chamber of commerce and merchants association they welcome the world to their town; they promote their city as being the best place to hold a meeting, to live in and do business; and they entice people to buy, buy, buy through well financed and good advertising programs.

A Recent "Time" magazine story said that Americans spend \$15 billion a year going to meetings and conventions. Last year tourists and conventioners spent \$4 billion in Missouri.

Conventions are good for downtown businesses, but they are good for cities. . . do cities want conventions? Most cities want all the conventions they can get. One reason is downtown businesses, thriving on convention goers, pay nearly a fourth of all city taxes. Another is the taxes added on to the food and lodging bills of conventioners goes to help build and pay for the convention centers and arenas.

Don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with making money from conventions. Kansas City now ranks eighth among the top convention cities of the nation, and I am for the convention and visitors bureau. city



officials, chamber of commerce and everybody else going all out to make Kansas City the number one convention city in the country.

However, just as I am for downtown businesses and the city making money from conventions, I am for some of the convention money coming into Kansas City finding its way to the black community. In particular, I want to see black businesses get more of the money that black convention goers spend here. If this happens, inner city businesses like downtown businesses can play a vital role in helping to keep their communities viable and prosperous.

Talking about businesses making money and thriving, downtown businesses expand, remodel and build new buildings because they can depend on the white convention trade. If black businesses wanted to do the same are there enough "black" meetings going on to keep black businesses busy and in business? Are black conventions a sure bet? Can black businesses plan on black conventions?

A recent story in the Louisville Defender pointed out that blacks are some of the meekest people in the country...during good times and bad times. An article in Ebony magazine (August 1979) said that middle-class black folks spend upwards of \$100 million a year attending national conventions to discuss black issues.

Blacks spend \$100 million going to conventions. How is the money spent? About half of the money is spent for airfare, lodging and meals. The other half for recreation, liquor, and entertainment.

Since blacks don't own any major airline, and most of the downtown hotels, restaurants, liquor stores, and family-fun and entertainment centers are owned by whites, how can local black business get a share of the millions of dollars black convention goers spend in their cities?

I suggest: 1) Black business people get out and tell the leaders of black organizations, black convention planners, and others why they should help them and how they can go about doing it, 2) Black convention planners start "looking out" for black businesses, 3) Black businesses set goals, and seek help in reaching their goals from their convention and visitors bureau, chamber of commerce, and black business organizations (such as the Black Economic Union and the Community Development Corporation in Kansas City) and, 4) Black businesses shape up their establishments by improving security and service and do more marketing and advertising.

With regard to black business people telling the leaders of black organizations and black convention planners how important black convention dollars are to their businesses, I am going to start this December when I attend my fraternity's national conclave meeting in Washington D.C. Here's what I want to do while I am attending Phi Beta Sigma's 65th Anniversary Conclave:

- * Talk to as many brothers and their wives (4,000 are expected) as I can about black businesses and black conventions.
- * Get appointed to the conclave's "Time and Place Committee" or appear before the committee and tell its members my story about black businesses and black conventions. The Time and Place Committee recommends the date and site/city for future conclaves.

* Seek out and spend some time talking about what black conventions can do to help black business with the following Sigmas: Brother Rev. Dr. Joseph H. Jackson, President of the 6 million member Baptist Convention, U.S.A.; Brother Eugene Dickerson, Imperial Potentate, Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shriners of North and South America; Brother Benjamin (Ben) Brown, deputy director of the Democratic National Committee; Brother Charles B. Wright, President, National Pan-Hellenic Council; Brother Charles C. Bookert, President, National Medical Association, and Brother Mel Patrick, Publisher of "Delegate," a national magazine about black conventions and where they meet.

* Spend some time talking about what black Conventions can do to help Black business with Ms. Janice Kissner, National Grand Basileus of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, and with Mrs. Thelma T. Daley (wife of Brother Guilbert Daley), National President of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

I don't know who the big name people are that have been invited to speak to the Sigmas this year. But, if it's Benjamin Hooks of the NAACP, Vernon Jordan, Jr., of the Urban League, Jesse Jackson of PUSH, or Dr. Joseph Lowery of SCLC, or all of them, I am going to try to talk to them about what their organizations can do to help black businesses.

Specifically, what can leaders of black organizations and black convention planners do for black businesses? When they plan and hold meetings they can:

1. Retain black convention planning consultants and black public relations people to help plan and promote their meetings and conventions.
2. Find out what the city government, convention and visitors bureau and the chamber of commerce are doing to help black businesses get some of the convention business coming to the city.



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