

**I've always been passionate about travel.** In my university days I put money aside so that I could go on trips, which was unusual for a black person from a rural village. I had done time as a management consultant and an HR director when I decided to follow my dream. I opened the business with one employee and a large office which echoed. It required a massive mind shift. When I traded in my BMW 5 Series for an Uno, I realised I would have to work very hard to live the life I wanted.

**The past three years have been exciting.** We now have five main offices around the country and a team of 80. From servicing only the private sector, we also cater for parastatals and government. The travel market has of course been challenging because companies have been forced to cut expenses on premium travel and to contain costs. Commoditisation also reduced our margins.

But we did a number of things to counter the recession. Although our core business is corporate travel, we positioned ourselves as strategy partners to clients. We help them to put in new policies, assess their travel portfolios, conduct travel audits, and consolidate their travel needs to a few suppliers so that we can negotiate good deals.

We've also created a strong brand by advertising like crazy which is unusual for a medium-sized company. Our goal is to be in the top five by 2015 and we can only get there if we make people aware of the excellent services we offer.

**We are about to launch a new division,** Duma ICE (Incentives, Conferences and Events), which will deliver high-value solutions to our clients, and also give us bigger margins.

Next year we are introducing Duma Sport, which will take advantage of South Africans' great love for sport. Corporates know that there can be no greater incentive than a trip to the 2011 Rugby World Cup in New Zealand, for example.

**Going into high-value-adding solutions and products is part of our strategy to counter the reduction of our margins,** and also to take advantage of opportunities that exist to create memorable experiences for travellers. We will leverage our existing client base and be able to grow it at the same time.

**I put in a lot of hours,** but I have a wife and two young children with whom I also spend time. I see my kids for at least two hours in the evenings, and I choose one day of the weekend to spend with them.

**Leadership examples are all around us.** I learn from people of stature like Obama and Mandela, but I also take lessons from my children. When it comes to strategy, I am a big fan of Ken Blanchard, Philip Kotler and Stephen Covey. Business owners have to be aware of the fact that you grow a business through other people. When I had worked very hard for the first two years, I decided to take a six-week holiday. It was a big decision, because I knew that the break was going to prove whether I was a business person with a sustainable company, or just someone who was self-employed. We experienced the biggest percentage of growth in the time I was away, and that was when I knew I had got it right. □

## THEMBA MTHOMBENI

founder Duma Travel  
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### ESTABLISHED

2002

### NATURE OF BUSINESS

Corporate travel specialist

### PERCENTAGE GROWTH

50% per year from 2008 to 2010

Themba Mthombeni left a high-paying executive job and took his passion for travel and turned it into a business that now has a turnover of R450 million a year. He did it by evolving his company from a booking agency into a high-value-adding consultancy that provides big corporates with innovative travel solutions.

# The voyager