

Creating Experiences

An Interview with Cameron Clark,
Senior Vice President - Development,
Hornblower Cruises & Events - New York



Cameron Clark and the Hornblower Hybrid and Hornblower Serenity

EDITORS' NOTE Cameron Clark has worked with Hornblower for over a decade, starting his career off as a Special Projects/Facilities Manager after graduating from the California Maritime Academy. He received his M.B.A. in Finance and Marketing from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

COMPANY BRIEF Since 1980, when it set sail as a two-ship operation on San Francisco Bay, Hornblower (hornblower.com) has exceeded guest expectations by maintaining impeccable comfort and safety standards for its vessels and facilities. Thanks to storied yachts, spectacular scenery, and diverse tour offerings, Hornblower today is a fast-growing business with a mix of 70 yachts and ferries serving both coasts and Canada.

Would you provide an overview of Hornblower's business within the New York/Tri-State market today and how it has grown?

We've always had an entrepreneurial company filled with amazing employees and crew that has allowed us to grow from a single small operation in Berkeley, California, with 40 people to where we are today. It was that continual innovative and entrepreneurial approach that allowed us to transition from a traditional dinner cruise company in California to the leading ferry operator and government boat operator within the country.

In the mid-1990s, we started doing consulting work and running other operations outside of the dinner boat industry for ferry operators and municipalities, as well as for casino ships. In the early 2000s, we were able to take that experience, coupled with our hospitality background and experience in creating amazing experiences, into the National Park Service concessions business. Our first expansion and successful contract was providing ferry service to Alcatraz, which is now running under the brand Alcatraz Cruises.

Shortly thereafter, an opportunity for the Statue of Liberty business was put out by the National Park Service. We were confident we could win it and build upon the success of the great service we were delivering at Alcatraz. Like everything else, timing and capacity aren't always aligned, but we had to take advantage of those opportunities. In late 2007, the National Park Service gave us the green light and a short timeline to launch a service covering the Statue

of Liberty and Ellis Island. On January 1, 2008 the Hornblower family of companies started their first operation in New York City.

We have been really blessed since that expansion. We have built an amazing team around Statue Cruises and created a great success. We realized it was only one component of the things we could do here. A few years after our New York launch, we expanded into the ferry commuter business by acquiring Liberty Landing Ferry Company. It runs ferries from Jersey City and Liberty State Park into the World Financial Center in Lower Manhattan. We saw this as an opportunity to improve the breadth of our service, but it also provided more opportunities for us to get into other markets in the New York area. That business has continued to grow year over year.

After that, we were able to expand through one of our affiliate companies, HMS Global Maritime, with a contract for ferry transportation to Governors Island.

In 2012, we brought the Hornblower brand to New York at Pier 40 in the West Village. This includes sightseeing charters, corporate events, weddings, and private events, among other things.

In late 2013/early 2014, we won another development project with the city where we were able to expand into South Street Seaport and Pier 15. Now, we are running nearly a million passengers through sightseeing-, cocktail-, and entertainment-style events in New York. It's an upcoming community and we're looking to reshape the products offered to meet the needs of the changing generation.

We've now grown to more than 450 employees in the New York market. This has not only gotten the attention of the city but, coupled with our success in Niagara, the city of New York and the New York City Economic Development Corporation saw that we not only had the vision, innovation, and experience to develop this mode of transportation, but also the willingness to reshape how people think of ferries and public transit. This led to a great opportunity we're working on now: Citywide Ferry by Hornblower, which will go into service next summer.

As Hornblower has grown in the New York market, have you been happy with the recognition for the brand?

I don't know if people currently understand the important role ferries can play in their daily commute. There is the perception that boats

and ferries are for visitors, except for those from Staten Island or New Jersey. Historically, ferries have not been at the same pricing as other modes of public transit.

There is a bit of sea change that will be necessary to educate people on ferries not only being a great way to get around but how they're also timely, reliable, and high-quality, all for the same price as the subway.

We're working hard on that messaging with our partners, businesses, and communities to ensure that these historically underserved communities are now going to have a viable opportunity to make commuting and connecting easier.

In terms of Hornblower, we operate as a house of brands with the realization that we're trying to solve different things for different people. We have a strong brand and people are continuing to recognize what we do. We deliver a quality product and service, but we're also trying to put emphasis and support on our varying operations.

Does hospitality come into play in all aspects of your operations?

Our voyage or mission as a company is simple: we create an amazing experience that has been a driving force behind the business from its inception. Our founder and CEO realized there was an opportunity to create something on a boat that was unique for many people.

A component of that is the interaction with the crew and their hospitality, and we haven't lost that connection from the early 1980s to today. That focus, even if it's just a smile and "welcome aboard" on a ferry, is something we commit to. In doing so, we provide a great experience, be it a five-minute ferry ride or a three-hour dinner cruise.

How much of a focus has corporate business been?

People like to be appreciated and businesses want to make sure their employees are respected. When we're out on the water in some of the beautiful areas in which we operate, we pride ourselves on the fact that people are seeing things from a different perspective.

People are very busy with their own lives. When they go to a restaurant or bar, the total price isn't much different than a cruise with us. However, we offer so much more that costs nothing – the beautiful skylines and sunsets, and it really improves employee morale. ●