

Why One of Kayak's Cofounders Took His Tesla and Became an Uber Driver

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Biz Carson



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On Halloween, Paul English dressed up as a vampire. Then he sat down behind the wheel of his \$100,000 Tesla Model S and turned on the Uber app.

English didn't become an Uber driver because he needs extra money. A decade ago, English cofounded the flight-finding website Kayak. Priceline bought the site for around \$2 billion two years ago, and since then English opened a \$20 million startup incubator in Boston and has been driving for Uber.



Paul English dressed up as a vampire while driving for Uber.



With Lola, English wants to bring back the travel-agent industry — an industry Kayak helped kill — by making accessing a travel agent as easy as opening an app.

"Fast forward 10 years later, I'm trying to figure out how to reinvent the travel agency and make humans more valuable than the machines and where can humans help you get the perfect trip," English said.

An executive assistant for everyone

He was initially going to build a competitor to Zirtual, the virtual-assistant company [that went bust overnight and laid off its 400 employees via email](#). But it was a tough business to be getting into, and his investors suggested he first focus only on travel.

"Just like in business travel, a lot of executives have executive assistants who book all their travel," English said. "And good executive assistants can be amazing in terms of simplifying your mind as a business traveler because they already know which airlines you prefer, what seating you prefer.

"We're trying to make travel that simple. That you have this person in your corner who knows all your preferences and will do all the research and booking for you."

That's when English turned to Uber. He started driving a few months ago because he wanted to feel how it was like to be rated.

"In the app, you get to rate your travel agent on a scale of one to five, just like you'd rate your Uber driver," English told Business Insider. "I wanted to know what it felt like to get rated and how it changed the dynamic between Uber and the driver."

It turns out English is slightly less than perfect — he has a 4.95 out of 5 — but he has no idea what he did to deserve a lower rating.

"I think sometimes if you're just kind and you talk to people, they appreciate it and you end up getting a good rating," he said. "Probably because they like the car and hopefully they like talking to me."

For now, Lola users will be able to rate their travel agent, but not the other way around. One of the most interesting things English has learned since driving for Uber is how many passengers the company boots off the system for unruly behavior or a low rating.

He doesn't have plans to let agents boot customers from Lola yet, but it's not off the table either.



As for the travel agents, the first group of full-time workers will be based entirely in Boston so Lola's engineers can sit next to the travel agents and figure out what can be built to help them.

English hopes that by treating the company's travel agents well, while keeping the rating system as a check, Lola can be as big as Kayak one day.

"Uber believes if you take care of your drivers, then ultimately they'll provide the best care of their passengers," English said. "And we're going to do something similar with travel agents. We believe if we take great care of our travel agents, they'll take best care of our travelers. "

<http://www.businessinsider.com/kayak-founder-paul-english-drives-tesla-for-uber-2015-12>

