omninews

See us at Album 2015

Visitors to the Omnibus stand at ALBUM in May will discover just how busy our in-house developers have been over the last year, with a series of enhancements to our market leading suite of software to meet new needs.

The Omnibus Bus Stop Asset Management module, OmniFLAG, has been completely re-designed, with a link into OmniMAP to create a powerful tool for Local Authority clients. OmniMAP, for planning, displaying and editing bus services and stops, now also links directly with OmniTIMES to allow users to extract mileage statistics for networks on a county by county basis.

CrewPLAN has also been improved, with greater flexibility and the potential to solve large and complex scheduling problems faster and with greater ease.

OmniDAS, our market-leading driver and vehicle allocation system, has always been at the forefront of developments and now it gives drivers better access to key information via the internet or a company Intranet. Drivers are now able to access personal information, such as holidays and payroll details, view details regarding their shifts and communicate with their depot to request overtime, shift changes, holidays and rest days.

OmniDAS also has a new automated module for engineers and all hourly paid employees, which allows users to set up timesheets for payroll in the same way as they do for drivers.

Michael Meilton, Business Development Manager for Omnibus, comments: "ALBUM gives us an ideal opportunity to keep everyone up to date with changes that we have made to our software. Even existing clients who use the systems every day will learn something new."

STAGECOACH LONDON TAKES THE OMNIBUS…

Stagecoach London is making a big change in its current scheduling software and adopting Omnibus software for the first time.

The company looked carefully at how suitable other products on the market were to meet their specific needs, and after considerable testing, Stagecoach London decided to adopt the OmniTIMES, OmniBASE, Crewplan, OmniROTA, and OmniMAN packages.

Garry Nicholass, Commercial Manager for Stagecoach London, comments: "the Omnibus software gave the best all round solution to our specific future London scheduling needs."

With a very experienced scheduling team and the need to plan for the successful future of the business, Stagecoach London decided that an enhanced package was needed for their changing business needs and therefore undertook an assessment of what the modern scheduling software market had to offer.

Garry explains: "We had a very specific remit that the system needed to be user friendly and with a proven ability to create timetables and bus and crew schedules accurately, efficiently and within tight timescales."

Omnibus worked very quickly to set everything up for Stagecoach London, and within a very short space of time terms were agreed and training was organised for the Stagecoach London schedulers. As Garry concludes: "the benefits are already beginning to be seen with the efficient production of easy to understand timetables, bus and crew workings and rotas."

National Express enhances Crewplan

National Express Bus is a long-standing customer of Omnibus, having used **OmniTIMES** and **OmniBASE** coupled with **Crewplan** to automatically produce efficient crew schedules. More recently they added **OmniMAP** which helps supply data to Real Time Information systems and move forward with EBSR.

Richard Brain, Scheduler for National Express West Midlands' largest garage, has fine-tuned Crewplan to find even more efficiencies. ▲

After using Crewplan at all locations, and achieving significant efficiencies, National Express decided to look more closely at the recent developments released in the system to see if there was more that they could do with it. Andy Foster, Head of Network Management for National Express Bus, explains: "We had achieved excellent results with Crewplan but knew that there was more that we could do if we carried out some development work and fine-tuned the parameters."

The company found the right person for the job in Richard Brain, a young scheduler responsible for Birmingham Central (the company's largest garage) who was immediately at home with the software.

"Richard was very keen to develop the system so that it gave us even more flexibility" says Andy.

Richard set to work on the different parameters within Crewplan to find the best setting for each garage and each set of drivers, as they all have differing scheduling agreements. "Each set of drivers needs the duties doing in a different way, tailored to their preferences" says Andy. "By taking Crewplan's capabilities and flexibility to the next level we have been able to meet those specific requirements and find even more efficiencies. What's more, drivers have begun to notice the changes and the feedback has been very positive."

Big Push for Electronic Registrations (EBSR)

The Department for Transport is undertaking a push to encourage more bus operators to adopt Electronic Bus Service Registration (EBSR). A recent consultation highlighted strong support for EBSR, with many operators that are already using it recognising the benefits.

They agreed that EBSR enabled them to share information more easily, for example providing travel information to public websites, especially as the data is generated to all stops level. It was also believed that using electronically generated bus service details as part of the contracting procedure should be encouraged.

The report sought to discover why EBSR has not been widely adopted and it found that there is still a perception that it is costly, complicated and time consuming. However, this was the opposite of Reading Buses' experience when they were the first Omnibus customer to make the move from paper to electronic registrations last year.

Steve Bell, Operations Support Manager for Reading Buses, comments: "We installed OmniMAP to work alongside OmniTIMES to create the necessary files, detailed to every stop on every route, to adopt EBSR and straight away I was very impressed. It has proved to be very easy to use and has saved us a lot of time and money. Registrations, which previously would have taken us several days, now just take a matter of minutes."

Andy Foster, Head of Network Management for National Express Bus, feels that the lack of uptake is largely down to a misconception. "People think that EBSR is an IT issue, but it isn't" he says, "you need someone who understands the registration process rather than the IT process, and then the rest is simple."

One of the report's key findings was, unsurprisingly, that smaller operators may be more willing to participate if all of the bigger operators submitted their registrations electronically.

Michael Meilton, Business Development Manager for Omnibus, agrees: "There has been interest from a number of operators to move towards EBSR. The first thing those that have made the switch say is that they should have doneit sooner, as it was much simpler than they had imagined and will clearly save them a lot of time in the run up to changes.

It also enables the information to be used and manipulated in lots of other ways.

"Uptake of EBSR has been slow because companies often see it as a giant step and they perceive that there is a loss of control of what is sent. However, with so many Government interactions now going online, such as tax returns and tendering submissions, the momentum is for all Government interactions to go that way, and Bus Registrations will be but one element of that. The change will come, it is only a matter of time."

The report concluded that the full roll-out of EBSR will be progressed and that the Department for Transport will 'engage further with key players to discuss the barriers and how these might be resolved'.

A DOUBLE FOR GO-AHEAD

Two companies in the Go-Ahead group have adopted new Omnibus software recently.

▲ *Nicholas Lawley (Schedules & Commercial Assistant for Go-Ahead South Coast) shows Matt King (Graduate Management Trainee) how OmniMAP works.*

Go South Coast has been an Omnibus customer for some time, having used OmniTIMES, OmniBASE, OmniROTA, Crewplan, OmniSTOP and TransXChange.

Now Go South Coast has completed the set by adding OmniMAP to help them to improve their operations even further.

Phil Curtis, Commercial Planning Manager at the Poole-based operator said: "We are pleased to extend our working relationship with Omnibus as a long-standing customer who finds the product effective and intuitive to use."

The recent addition of OmniMAP will be particularly useful to the operator as they make plans for EBSR later this year, as Phil explains: "OmniMAP will help us compile route data in a quick and efficient manner and allow us to calculate times for stops in between main timing points as well as distances for each route variation. Not only will the new software help meet our needs, it will also allow us to prepare for the forthcoming wider rollout of EBSR."

▲ *The East Anglian bus companies owned by Go-Ahead (which includes Konectbus) are using Omnibus software for the first time.*

In another area of the country, the Go-Ahead Group is using Omnibus software for the first time.

The East Anglian bus companies owned by Go-Ahead (Konectbus, Anglian Bus, Hedingham and Chambers) have taken on the full range of Omnibus software for their operations.

Previously, the companies were not using any scheduling software, and have decided on Omnibus in order to provide files for TransXChange and real-time systems.

Paul Hartigan, Group Bus Applications Manager, says the full scheduling package was essential: "Our manual system was simply taking too long, so the addition of Omnibus software will be a significant benefit to all of the local operators, enabling them to do so much more with the data."

Omnibus is providing full training.

A new face at Omnibus

Omnibus has strengthened its Business Development team with the appointment of Marc Knott.

Marc joins Omnibus with over 25 years of experience in passenger transport, having worked previously in all areas of bus operations with First Huddersfield, First Manchester and more recently Yorkshire Tiger where he was Operations Manager.

Marc was also Transport Manager for Halifax Joint Committee and part of the team which successfully bid for the local PTE contract. His responsibilities included producing timetables and registrations, duties and rosters.

Marc brings a wealth of valuable operational experience to the Omnibus team, and his insight will enable him to add value to the links between Omnibus customers and the company's OmniDAS and scheduling software.

Marc will be at ALBUM to introduce himself to as many Omnibus customers as possible and begin developing new relationships with customers.

Michael Meilton, Business Development Manager for Omnibus, says that Marc's skill set will be extremely valuable to the business: "Marc has had many years of experience in managing bus operators of all sizes, and his familiarity with our software packages will see him well placed to advise customers and prospective customers on which systems will suit their needs."

REMOVING THE MARGIN FOR ERROR

By his own admission, Nick Hornsby (Managing Director of Hornsby's Travel) found that due to the sheer amount of data that they were handling, the prospect of making changes to their timetables and schedules was 'enough to make a grown man cry'. That was until they installed OmniBASE and OmniTIMES just under a year ago.

"Our business had grown to such an extent that making changes manually was taking far too long and involved too many errors" explains Nick. Making enquiries about bus scheduling software, Nick discovered that people in the industry were full of praise for Omnibus, "and North Lincolnshire Council were already using OmniTIMES, so we could see that there would be synergies in adopting an Omnibus system" says Nick.

When road works were announced along a major route into Scunthorpe, and Hornsby's were faced with putting on extra buses to keep passengers moving, the decision was made to make the switch from a manual system to an automated one.

After a shorter than expected period of learning, Traffic Manager Craig Tuplin soon found that the efficiencies were helping the software pay for itself: "Omnibus helped us with the initial feeding in of data but everything was very straight forward and

the system works even better than we expected it to and it is very easy to make changes quickly and without errors – it just won't let you make a mistake!"

Now, changes that used to take up to twelve hours to work through are completed far more efficiently, as Nick explains: "The software has really exceeded our expectations with its flexibility and speed. We have been able to trim out excess time and make our operation more efficient. We really couldn't do without it now."