

Welcome to CBUK (Stand C10)

It's that time of year again, when everyone at Omnibus is preparing for our annual trip to the NEC. This year we are of course attending the newly re-named Coach and Bus UK.

The brand new OmniSTOP design is expected to attract a lot of interest from operators wanting to create flexible bus stop publicity in an instant. Its new features include total control over styles, fonts, graphics, colours and even paper size, giving the opportunity to fully incorporate any relevant branding.

Driver communication is also expected to be a key topic. With large numbers of drivers to manage it can become challenging for operators to manage all their requests for information. The new Omnibus new driver App, myDAS Touch, is an integral part of the OmniDAS driver self-service module, linking drivers directly with the Omnibus depot allocation system. It allows drivers to access all their own details, including rota and holiday details, from their phone whilst out and about, or from other devices when at home.

Training is another hot topic at the moment, and Omnibus is launching a new service to help schedulers to make the most of the software. More details about the new Omnibus training scheme are on the back page of this issue of OmniNEWS.

Peter Crichton, Managing Director of Omnibus, comments: "As usual we have a lot to talk about with visitors to CBUK this year. We are looking forward to sharing these new developments with customers and helping others to address scheduling or communication issues with our range of solutions."

Our stand is located next to the Seminar Theatre. We look forward to seeing you there.



▲ Come see us on Stand C10 next to the Seminar Theatre



▲ Carol and Peter Crichton with Iain Duncan Smith at the Palace of Westminster

AN INVITATION TO WESTMINSTER

Omnibus directors Peter and Carol Crichton attended a celebratory evening at the House of Commons to mark the company's contribution to the 2017 Parliamentary Review.

Earlier this year, Omnibus was asked to represent the UK's Technology industry by providing an article in the annual Parliamentary Review.

Only a small number of outstanding organisations are selected to feature in the Review, which is distributed to leading policymakers with the strategic aim of raising standards through sharing best

practice. The Review is published at the start of each parliamentary year, and demonstrates how sector leaders have responded to challenges in the political and economic environment.

Peter Crichton expressed his pride and delight at Omnibus being recognised in this way: "It was a huge honour to have been selected, not least of all because so very few businesses are invited to contribute to the Review. Over the years we have built a very successful, independent, family run business and we are more than happy to share with our peers some of the knowledge that we have gained."

Blink and it's done

Timetable and marketing material designers know the frustrations of turning data into the desired layout. But working with Omnibus, Yellow Buses has reduced the time it takes to create branded timetables to less than a quarter of a second.

Russell Babidge, a graphic designer for the Bournemouth bus operator, explains: "Like most graphic designers I use Adobe In Design to create marketing material. To set up each timetable I used to have to isolate the information and then re-build it within the software. This could take up to an hour for every timetable, so to do every single one would take weeks."

Russell worked with Omnibus developers to speed up the process using OmniEXPORT, which works with OmniTIMES to format data into the correct layout to produce leaflets, booklets and advertising material.

▼ Graphic designers for Yellow Buses worked with Omnibus developers to speed up the process of creating bus stop displays using OmniEXPORT



Omnibus created tags for every line so that the data could be sorted by bus route, destination, times and other data within the timetable. The tags control which style, font, size and colour is allocated to the data and automatically put it all into the correct layout.

"Previously I would have data all over the place and it took a lot of man hours to put it all into the correct format. Now it takes less than a nanosecond and it's all where it should be every time" say Russell.

OMNIDAS ESTABLISHED AT CT PLUS

Installing OmniDAS has transformed the way CT Plus's London Red Bus function manages its operation, from the allocations department to finance, admin and even the insurance team.

Like many operators, the company started out using Excel spreadsheets. Also, like many operators, the company soon found it to be cumbersome, time consuming and open to human error.

When searching for a suitable software system, CT Plus needed something that would keep pace with the operator's rapid



▲ Everyone in the operations team uses OmniDAS as an endless source of information

growth, provide flexibility, was easy to use, but all at the right price. Sylwia Lesniak, one of the Allocations Officers at CT Plus explains: "We wanted to improve our efficiency with a system that was able to support not only the allocations department but everyone across the company, like controllers as well as drivers, driver managers, finance, admin, scheduling and the insurance department. We found what we were looking for in OmniDAS."

The various, tailored reports that OmniDAS produces were also a key selling point, as was its ease of use. "It was important for us to use one source as a main reference point which would be transparent and easily accessible by everyone, with the ability to store all sorts of records (personal, training, accidents at work, attendance, rota changes etc.) in one place" says Sylwia.

Sylwia had come across other software systems, but found OmniDAS to be the most user friendly. She explains why this is particularly important for CT Plus: "Our workforce contains employees from different backgrounds and with different abilities, but they all find OmniDAS to be self-explanatory and reasonably easy to use."

Sylwia knows that there is more that OmniDAS can do for CT Plus, "everyone in the operations team uses OmniDAS as an endless source of information and as the best place to furnish ourselves with the information needed with lots more potential to be discovered."

Over the years the Omnibus team has provided ongoing support for CT Plus, which Sylwia says has been invaluable. "They have a great customer support team," she says, "they are easy to talk to, quick and very responsive. I think it's one of the best customer services I've experienced over the years."

She concludes: "As a business that is constantly growing, moving away from the paper-based system was an imperative. If not for OmniDAS we would still be in the dark ages. It has brought our operations into a "new age" where we can be real competitors to the other bus companies."

CT Plus is the only social enterprise that operates London red bus services under contract for Transport for London (TfL). The income is reinvested across communities in London, providing job creation and delivering transport for lonely, vulnerable and isolated people.

It's all in the Data

Omnibus has developed a number of tools to help operators to manage data and use it to improve efficiencies and to meet new regulations. With the terms 'Big Data' and 'Open Data' becoming widely used in the transport sector, many operators and local authorities were lacking the ability to use all of the existing data available to them.

One of the main aims of the Bus Services Act was the requirement for operators to provide data on timetables, fares and real time information as open data, including a move to Electronic Registration for bus services (EBSR). "We are waiting for secondary legislation from the Department for Transport to pave the way," said Michael Meilton of Omnibus, "but this has been delayed whilst the Mayoral Powers aspects of the Act are finalised and implemented. EBSR will however become a reality at some point soon and operators need to take steps to be ready."

"Another area where Operators and Local Authorities struggle," Michael continues,

"At Omnibus we have developed a number of tools to splice data to extract what it is the user really wants to see."

"is in having tools to allow them to utilise the data fully. At Omnibus we have developed a number of tools to splice data to extract what it is the user really wants to see. Using the Open Data from Traveline, for example, we supply tools to extract this by operator, Local Authority area and a host of other options."

The software tools have all been developed in close relationship with clients, as Michael explains: "We are continually listening to what our clients want and trying to meet their needs. With the coming push towards full EBSR what we have been asked for recently has been a tool that allows you to compare two EBSR files. This will enable Local Authorities to see at a glance what is different between the files, for example whether it is just a journey that has moved by a few minutes or a wholesale change of timetable."

Michael continues: "The innovative tools that we have developed have the scope to save time and give users a lot more power to fully exploit the data. The commercial opportunities for operators and Local Authorities are huge and Omnibus plans to continue developing the tools that the industry needs to fully manage its data."

EBSR will become a reality soon and operators need to take steps to be ready ▼

▼ Andrew and Suresh are the latest recruits to the Omnibus development team



OMNIBUS EXPANDS

While the commercial team is welcoming visitors to the Omnibus stand at Coach & Bus UK at the NEC, the development team will be busy moving into new offices in Hollinwood Business Centre, Oldham, which has been the company's headquarters since 2001.

While Omnibus has grown considerably over the years, it is the team of developers, the brains behind the software, that has seen the largest number of new employees joining.

The two latest new recruits to the development team are Andrew Newton and Suresh Rathinasamy. Suresh is developing a range of new EBSR web tools (and we have more on EBSR on this page), and Andrew is providing IT and networking expertise for the team.

Their original office has been bursting at the seams, with lots of 'hot-desking', so the developers have moved to a much bigger space on the floor directly below the rest of the Omnibus team.



▼ An understanding of basic scheduling principles is the cornerstone of being able to make sound commercial decisions on service changes

New training programme launches

Training within the industry is an area in which Omnibus sees a growing need, as the next generation of schedulers and planners come forward.

Training has always been an important part of the work that Omnibus does with customers when new software is installed. The team will spend several days at the customer's premises getting them up and running as quickly as possible. The training is tailored for each client depending on their previous knowledge, the experience of their in-house team and what they want to get from the software.

"What we are now seeing as new schedulers and planners come into their roles," explains Omnibus MD Peter Crichton, "is the need for two distinct types of training. Firstly, for those who are new to Scheduling there is a need to understand the principles behind the process (such as constructing a timetable or drivers' duties and rosters) and secondly, to be fully conversant with our software to ensure new users can get the most out of it."

These are two areas that Omnibus is looking to address to ensure this emerging need is met. To meet the first, Omnibus is pleased to announce the acquisition of the highly respected manual scheduling course, developed and run by Jim Hulme, which the company plans to develop further to meet the growing demand. "There is a need to understand basic scheduling principles, and Jim's course offers exactly that," says Peter, "they are the cornerstone of being able to make sound commercial decisions on service changes." To ensure a smooth handover, Jim will be involved in the transition to Omnibus in an advisory capacity.

In addition, Omnibus is developing a series of training sessions based at its Hollinwood offices to provide both 'beginner' and 'advanced' sessions in all their software.

Peter continues: "What we are finding is that when a new person joins a scheduling or planning team, companies often struggle to justify the cost of training them fully in the software. What we plan to offer is a series of open training sessions on our software based at our Hollinwood office with up to four places per session. The courses will

not be company-specific, but will cover the key elements of the software and allow people to get started when they return to the workplace."

The aim of offering these new training options is to provide a more cost-effective choice. Omnibus will still be offering bespoke on-site training where it is required.

"There will be a series of courses designed for companies that have had Omnibus software for some time and need to train new employees, rather than relying on third hand knowledge from within an organisation that may not be using the software at its full potential. Alongside the standard training programme, there will be additional top-up courses, designed to dig deeper into the software," explains Peter.

"You wouldn't simply give someone accounting software and expect them to come up with a set of accounts, and the same applies to scheduling. You need to understand the data that you are inputting and what you expect to see as a result, otherwise the results are meaningless. We need to place these tools in trained hands and at the same time invest in training the schedulers of the future."

CONTACT

Omnibus
Hollinwood Business Centre
Albert Street, Hollinwood
Oldham, OL8 3QL
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)161 683 3100
www.omnibus.uk.com

omnibus

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