

Case study

Trent Barton Buses

Trent Barton is one of the very few independent bus operators in the UK. Owned, managed and staffed by local people, they offer a more personal service than their much larger rivals.

The company employs nearly 1000 people in various parts of Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire and runs a fleet of around 330 modern buses on a network of local routes. They have one of the most modern bus fleets in the country, with an average age of about 3 years. Over 70% of the fleet are easy-access, Super Low Floor buses and they are on target to reach 100% by the end of 2005, ten years ahead of Government targets.

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The Challenge

Since the commercialisation of the bus industry in 1986 Trent Barton have carried out substantial market research to identify customers' (and prospective customers') needs. Outstanding levels of customer service have been a key differentiator for them as a provider.

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the softer/customer skills,” says Guy Gibson, training manager at Trent Barton Buses. “Each bus is in effect a mobile business and we need drivers who are proactive, forward thinking in terms of customer care and able to use their initiative to deal with a crisis on the spot. We know where our buses are at 5.30am before they leave the depot but after that they are solely in the care of our drivers. We had to identify people at interview who would be friendly, outgoing and willing to develop good relationships with our customers.”

The Solution

Trent Barton used Thomas' Personal Profile Analysis (PPA) to profile potential drivers as part of their recruitment process. In this way they could ensure their drivers have the right behavioural qualities for the job.

PPA assesses an individual's behaviour in the work environment. It can answer questions such as – What are their strengths and limitations? Are they self starters? How do they communicate? What motivates them? The PPA enables people to become more self aware, which in turn gives them the means to consolidate their working strengths and compensate for their limitations.

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The PPA is a series of 24 questions on a forced choice “first impressions” basis, taking no longer than seven minutes to complete. The answers are charted on a graph under the four headings of Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Compliance (DISC).

Gibson continues, “Getting the right people from the start was absolutely fundamental for us. Our people are the main reason we were voted UK Bus Operator of the Year in 1999, 2001 and 2003 and runner up in 2000 and 2002.

“Most of our 800 or so drivers work in small teams on regular routes and many are on first name terms with regular customers. We encourage people to take ownership of these routes. It is this personal service and attention to detail that has made us an award winning bus company, putting us head and shoulders above our competitors. It is much easier to train someone to be a bus driver than it is to train them to be nice. Each of our drivers greets people when they come onto the platform, they make eye contact and smile. This type of behaviour is difficult to train. By identifying people from the outset with these characteristics we are then able to focus on the skills we can change, such as their driving ability.”

“We are so confident in our customer service that we were the first bus company in the UK to introduce a no quibble, on-the-spot money back guarantee. In 2003 for every million tickets sold only 4 people asked for their money back. We are also one of the few bus companies in the UK to see a year on year increase in passenger numbers. In 2003 we carried 35 million people.

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