

CUSTOMER

Virgin Trains

SECTOR

Information Systems

Rail Ticket Retailing

at Virgin Trains
Ticket Office,
Birmingham
New Street

LBFoster®



In April 2013, **Birmingham New Street** train station unveiled the first phase of major redevelopment project to transform the station into a modern technologically advanced transport hub. A fresh approach to transportation revealed a station built for the future, with the final phase to finish in the summer 2015.



Birmingham New Street station is used by 140,000 passengers very day. This major redevelopment was initiated to construct a world class station and create a brighter, clearer and more enjoyable space with improved facilities by using the latest in technology to enhance passenger journeys. Situated in the centre of the new station, the Virgin Trains ticket office revolutionises the way in which journeys are planned and tickets are purchased.

Challenge

Virgin Trains operate a strict Passengers Charter with a firm commitment to offering customers a safe, high quality service. Outlined in this charter, Virgin Trains is committed to ensuring that customers using their ticket offices and travel centres are served within five minutes, or within three minutes at less busy times. With the development of the new ticket office, Virgin Trains

wanted to lead the way in modernising the process for ticket sales and enquires. By working in collaboration with the Netpractise team, they developed an innovative customer experience with the objective of migrating passengers towards self-service kiosks and reducing overall waiting times for face to face enquiries.

Approach

Initially approached in January 2013, Netpractise set about designing a customer flow management system to encompass all of the requirements of a busy major station ticket office. The current Virgin Trains ticket offices situated at 17 stations across the UK, have the traditional standard queuing system for rail passengers. It consists of a desk with a queue for customers, who wish to purchase tickets to travel today and a desk with a queue of customers, who wish to purchase advance tickets, or discuss their journey with a customer services representative. This traditional approach has its limitations. Customers often have to wait longer to be served and are not able to attend to other tasks or sit whilst waiting to be seen. Measuring waiting times, passenger numbers and enquiries is only possible through observation studies and manual reporting, which is both time consuming and costly.

The Virgin Trains customer management team were keen to completely transform the experience by offering what they originally nicknamed the 'deli counter approach'. A netpractise project team was assigned to the task and they conducted a series of workshops to develop and refine a new system which enhanced the customer experience and met the need for instant information reporting for the Virgin Trains management team. Mike Bones, Senior Project Manager at Virgin Trains, commented "Timescales were very tight, but there was a joint willingness to succeed with a positive approach from both parties." Through collaborative working practises, Netpractise delivered a customer flow management system in time for the major Birmingham New Street station opening to the public on 30th April 2013.

Solution

When entering the Virgin Trains ticket office passengers, are greeted by a customer services advisor who will direct them to the automated self service ticket booth for simple transactions or to the touchscreen kiosks within the centre, if they prefer a face to face interaction. The Virgin Trains touchscreen kiosks provide the customer with three options: tickets for travel today, tickets for future travel (Advanced) and other enquires. The

customer uses the touch screen to select their option and is issued with a numbered position in the queue via a physical ticket. The message on the kiosk screen encourages them to move to the waiting area and watch the large screen displays to be directed to the appropriately allocated desk when called. There are two large display screens situated at each side of the ticket office and they show clearly the numbered positions in the queue.



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Mike Bones
Senior Project
Manager
Virgin Trains

The display screens also show additional information including the time, date, weather information, SKY News feeds and Birmingham New Street station information. The provision of such media can often make waiting times seem shorter and provide a useful tool for Virgin Trains to communicate messages to passengers. When an appropriate customer service advisor is available, the customer number is displayed on the screen and called via an audio message.

After the hardware installation, netpractise facilitated a series of usability sessions to test the system before it was launched. They provided on-site training for frontline managers and customer service advisors. Following the 'go live' date, netpractise continued to support the Virgin Trains customer flow management system with regular updates and addressed any issues experienced after the launch.

Results

The system enables Virgin Trains to create a more desirable environment for customers to manage their journey plans and purchase tickets. It reduces their overall waiting period by directing their query to the most appropriate customer services advisor. The system improves the flow of passengers moving through the ticket office by reducing the number of passengers standing to queue in lines at the front of each desk. The management reporting system can show valuable up to the minute information, including volume of passengers, waiting times and can split this information by type of enquiry. This instant information can enable the Virgin Train management team to plan resources accordingly and measure compliance against industry regulations. The data gathered will assist Virgin Trains in the future to effectively manage staffing levels and match resources to meet daily demands.

Summary

For this major landmark station, the unique customer flow management system implemented by Netpractise, in partnership with Virgin Rail, has vastly improved the overall ticket retailing customer experience. The system was developed and implemented within a very short period of time and provides Virgin Trains with the essential information reporting they need to allocate resources. Netpractise continues to support the system, which has the flexibility to allow for future changes and developments. Due to the successful implementation of the project, there are future plans to expand this system to other major Virgin Trains stations across the UK.

