

SEASIDE SPECIAL

The Album Conference - Blackpool

We are getting ready for our annual outing to the Album Conference – and this year we are taking a trip up the coast to Blackpool.

The theme for this year's Conference is "Driving the customer experience" and Omnibus will support the theme by helping delegates to identify areas where the company's software can offer operational efficiencies.

The Album theme of putting the customer first is echoed by the Omnibus approach to its customers. Partnerships are developed in order to assist customers in obtaining the best out of the software, and new developments and bespoke features are shared with existing customers so that everyone benefits.

As has been the case in previous years, this year's Album programme mixes conference sessions with a networking exhibition, where we will have our usual stand. Delegates and their guests will also benefit from a variety of activities including heritage tram rides and traditional fish and chip suppers.

We hope to see as many of our industry friends as possible there.



PART OF THE DAILY ROUTINE

This year's ALBUM host, Blackpool Transport, has been a valued Omnibus customer for many years. Mandy Davies, Head of Operations, tells OmniNEWS that the software has become part of Blackpool Transport's daily routine.

She explains: "We use [OmniDAS](#) and [OmniMAP](#) along with other products from Omnibus, which has assisted the Blackpool Transport planning team to streamline our work more efficiently. These products are very compatible with the way we run our business. We are also going to now register our services through the Electronic Bus Service Registration system ([EBSR](#)).

Mandy is also full of praise for the Omnibus support line. She says: "The call is answered immediately and so we are never kept waiting for a solution and we can just get on with what we are doing."

The various Omnibus products are used by many people across the company, including drivers who use a self service touch screen in OmniDAS to access their details. "Everyone who uses Omnibus software has confidence in the system that it does exactly what it is supposed to do" says Mandy.

Blackpool is in the process of introducing myDAS Touch, the Omnibus driver app, which should be up and running by the time delegates gather at the ALBUM conference in May.



Blackpool Transport parades its 25 brand new Enviro 400 City Buses along the promenade ▼

AN EVOLUTION IN BUS STOP DESIGN

On a training visit to Omnibus HQ in Hollinwood last year, Lee Murphy and a colleague were shown a new software product that developers were testing. They instantly realised that it represented a huge evolution in bus stop design for them.

The new product was *Omnistopdesign*, and now it is widely used by CT Plus Guernsey, part of HCT Group, following Operations Manager Lee's visit. It was added to the other products that the operator uses on the Channel Island: [Omnitimes](#), [OmniBase](#), [OmniROTA](#), [CrewPLAN](#), [OmniMAP](#) and [TransXChange](#).

Lee explains: "We went to Omnibus last year for some training, as although we had an understanding of what we used on a day-to-day basis, we felt that we would benefit from some further in-depth knowledge. We saw a demo version of *Omnistopdesign* and I was astonished by the flexibility of what the software could help us achieve."

Lee and his colleague were already using *Omnistop*, but when they made the switch to *Omnistopdesign* they were instantly able to develop their publicity into far more appealing and relevant products.

The software's flexibility has been key for CT Plus Guernsey, as Lee explains: "It enables us to create a range of templates that suit the footfall of the particular stop."

For low use stops, we can incorporate adverts. For high use stops we can switch between simple route numbers or destination listings against each time with just one click."

The new designs have impressed their customers, who have commented on the clarity of the new signs, as well as the reduction of 'white space', achieved because the system plots in a range of adverts to fill the gaps.

Omnistopdesign has also speeded up the process of changing publicity displays, and because the system is so easy to use, Lee needed minimal additional training. He says: "The system is very intuitive and completely in line with how the other Omnibus products operate. All their software is straightforward, logical to use and well supported - the staff at Omnibus have been invariably helpful during every one of my multiple calls over the last 6 years of using their products."

Lee is such a fan of *Omnistopdesign* that he has recommended it to his colleagues on Jersey.



▲ The flexibility of *Omnistopdesign* has been key for CT Plus Guernsey

A personal recommendation

Personal recommendation is of huge importance to Omnibus, with a high proportion of new business originating through word of mouth. When Dean Robbie was Operations Manager at Ipswich Buses, a colleague recommended Omnibus software and the company went on to purchase several software products, including [OmniDAS](#), [Omnitimes](#) and [OmniBase](#).



Service changes and schedule changes at Stephensons will be so much easier with Omnibus ▼

When Dean moved to his new role as Service Delivery Manager South at Stephensons of Essex, he was pleased to see that the company was considering using Omnibus software as the company would see cost efficiencies if they adopted it.

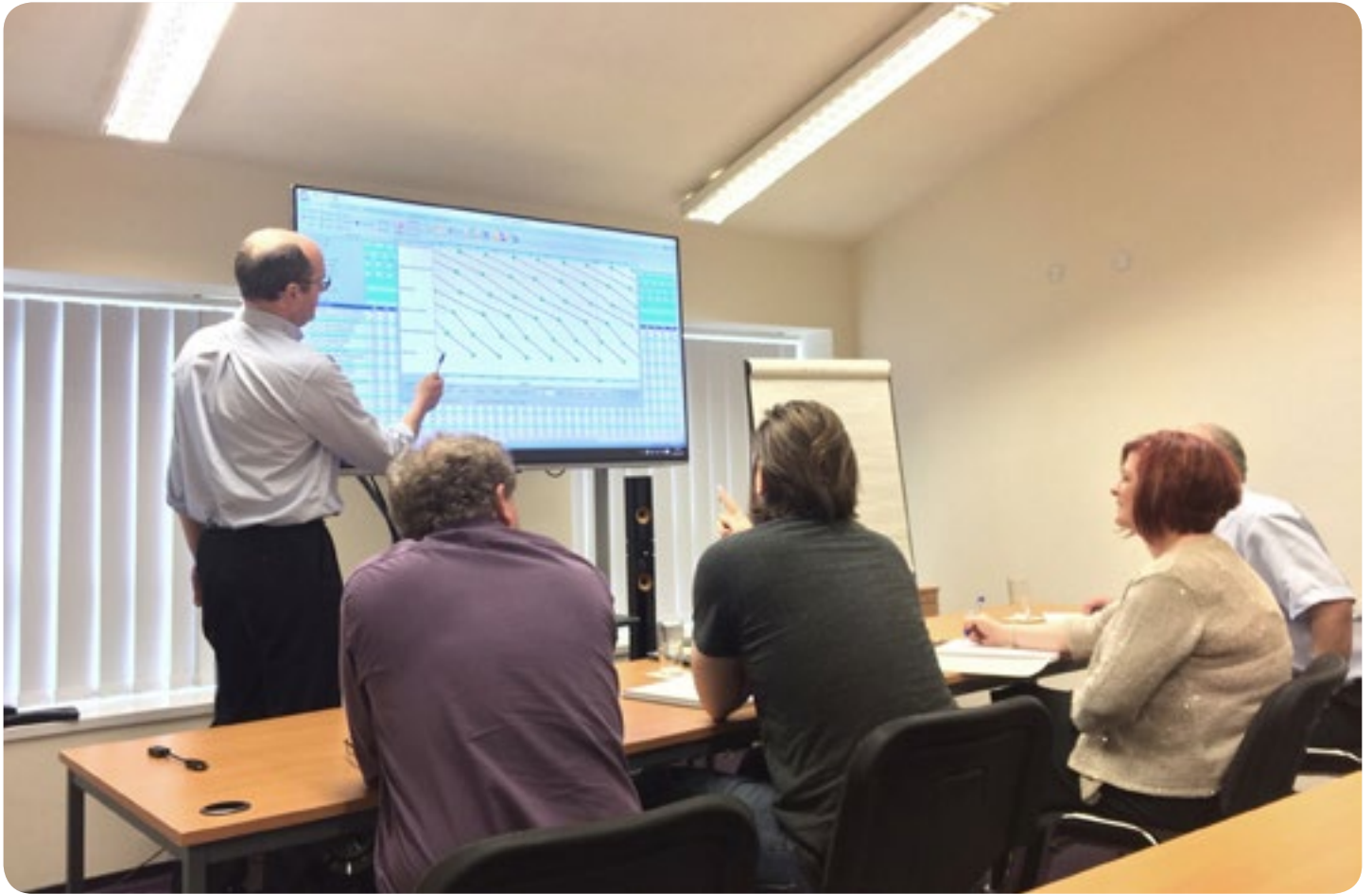
Dean explains: "We were using Excel spreadsheets, which served the business well up to a point, but were clumsy whenever we wanted to make any changes. The business was beginning to outgrow this manual method and having used the Omnibus software previously I knew what it was capable of and how easy it was to use." Dean continues: "Without any hesitation we went with them and the system was installed in July last year."

Within three months Stephensons had upgraded to *Omnitimes*, for creating instant and accurate timetables, and *OmniBase* for scheduling, along with the *TransXChange* module.

Stephensons has five main depots and several smaller outstations, and each timetable is specific to a depot. "Service changes and schedule changes will be so much easier with Omnibus now and should lead to cost savings and efficiencies" says Dean.

Dean didn't need any initial training because he had many years of experience in using the Omnibus software, but he has found the ongoing technical support to be invaluable. "I always find the Omnibus hotline to be extremely efficient. They are second to none as far as I am concerned."

Reaping the rewards of employee training



Every business has roles where training is viewed as essential, while for other areas it is seen as a cost burden because the benefits aren't being quantified in terms of the bottom line.

In the bus industry, drivers must undertake 5 days of training every 5 years to maintain their Certificate of Professional Competence in order to continue working. Yet there are many other employees in other roles who would benefit from just one day of training a year, and for most the cost of the training would be recouped through the resulting improved efficiencies.

There is one area of a bus operator's business where training can deliver significant cost savings. Driver costs account for at least 45% of an operator's expenditure, so it is essential that these are effectively controlled, and in many ways this control lies in the hands of schedulers and allocation staff. Surely their training is therefore just as

important for the bottom line of the business?

Many schedulers use software to aid and inform decision making and help guide them to making better choices. "Omnibus provides effective software for both scheduling and driver allocation, but the effectiveness of these powerful software packages is in the hands of the members of staff using them" explains Michael Meilton, Omnibus Special Projects Manager.

To ensure that they are getting the best from their software, refresher and more advanced training can reap rewards. Michael explains: "After the initial training to get users up and running, many get set in their ways. They are not aware that they can explore and experiment with the system to find easier and more effective ways to work with it."

He continues: "Any amount invested in some carefully tailored training sessions is a very small figure compared to the potential savings. Through learning how to do things better, even a very small percentage on a

company's annual driver payroll will more than cover the cost, so a CPC-style training day for all operating staff can make sound financial sense."

Succession training is another important area. When staff change and someone new comes into a role, they need more than an afternoon to pass on all their knowledge of the software to the novice. Often there is no overlap and the new user is simply provided with a set of manuals.

Without proper training, the new user is left floundering, yet this is the person whose next set of driver schedules will impact on the company's bottom line.

Michael concludes: "We would encourage all companies to build on the training programmes for drivers and broaden it to all operating staff to explore how they could do their job better. It is of course a process we are happy to help with."

▼ The Anam Cara Trust aims to provide vital help to 1,500 Mombasa street children



The forgotten children

Omnibus Director Carol Crichton has launched a very special charity, in memory of the Doctor who looked after her through many years of serious ill health and saved her life on more than one occasion. The Anam Cara Trust (the old Gaelic term for “soul friend”) will clothe, feed, educate, shelter and counsel up to 1,500 Mombasa street children through a purpose built drop-in centre, fully funded by the Trust.



Working alongside Vicky Ferguson from the street children charity Glad’s House and Amie Willenberg from the Harambee Schools Kenya charity, which Omnibus has supported for many years in its aims to provide school transport in the country, Carol is passionate

about helping the forgotten children. She explains: “These kids live on the streets and waste dumps of Mombasa, as children in Kenya have done for generations. They don’t make the news because this is sadly an established way of life – they are simply forgotten by the Western World.”

Carol’s Trust has big ambitions, that are already being realised less than a year after the idea came to her. “The charity has already purchased the land and HSK have appointed a Project Manager and Construction Consultant and we will break ground in September with the centre due to be opened next year.”

The building will house medical facilities, classrooms, counselling facilities, washrooms and recreation areas plus a kitchen to help feed 250 street kids every day.

“As soon as I started talking to people about this project it really captured people’s imaginations and spurred them into action” says Carol, “I have had ladies making clothes and teddy bears to send out to the kids and

the local District Nurses have promised to collect unused dressings that they can’t use but can be shipped out.”

Carol is also using her crafting skills to raise further funds for the project. She has raised over £1,500 through making and selling bespoke handbags and greetings cards. “Dunelm has donated all their old fabric swatches to my craft project” says Carol.

Even small amounts of money raised can make a huge difference. Clean toothbrushes, so that children aren’t sharing them with the rest of the family and being exposed to infections such as HIV, cost just 10p and a child can be fed for a year on just £15.

“Working on this project has really opened up my eyes as to how much we can achieve with so little,” says Carol, “and everyone I have spoken to has instantly come up with ways in which they can help. It’s been truly humbling.”

Carol is formally launching the Anam Cara Trust at the European Bus Forum Dinner in Manchester in June.

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