



Customer Experience Project

Online bus information

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1. Executive summary

1.1. Key findings

- Those who accessed online bus information through the Lancashire County Council (LCC) website found it accessible. The majority used the search engine 'Google' and found that the website was displayed on the first page of search results. Following on, they were then able to locate the online bus information website.
- Problems were identified with the presentation and navigating the online bus information website. These included the website being seen as cluttered which caused some confusion and slightly increased the time taken by some to navigate around the website.
- The Traveline journey planner was found useful and praised by many. However, a number of issues were identified including acronyms being used and a mystery shopper noted that when they entered their details into the Traveline website it reverted back to the Traveline homepage.

1.2. Recommendations

1.1.1. Links on the A-Z index

- It is recommended that the links on the A-Z index on the LCC website could be reviewed. At the present online bus timetables are situated under 'd', 'download timetables and bus service changes' which is not the most intuitive heading.

1.1.2. Redesigning the website

- The LCC website needs to be made clearer by removing the visual clutter. Currently, there are too many prompts for classes of information resulting in confusion when navigating the website. This could be improved by reducing the number of links, focusing on key information and rearranging the links into the centre of the web page.

1.1.3. Traveline online journey

- It is recommended that the Sustainable Transport Team reports back the positive comments to Traveline but also highlights the suggestions for improvement and the potential problem identified by one mystery shopper.
- One suggestion is the possibility of the online planner identifying routes where saver tickets can be purchased.
- The potential problem which needs to be explored is why on one occasion when details were entered on the Traveline journey planner it reverted back to the Traveline homepage.

2. Introduction

Customer Experience Projects are undertaken to gain a better understanding of the customer or end user experience of LCC services and how they compare to the frontline staff experience of delivering services. This will facilitate service-level improvements.

This research was commissioned by the Sustainable Transport Team to identify how easy it is for people to access online bus information via the LCC website.

2.1. Background

The customer experience project aims to complement quantitative methods of measuring performance, satisfaction and experience currently used across the organisation, with qualitative information allowing services at all levels to reveal a deeper understanding of people's experience. This is done to provide service managers with the necessary information to improve performance, conduct service redesign and manage customer service more effectively.

A customer experience project was conducted last year for the Sustainable Transport Team to look at how members of the public access bus information. The team is currently looking to reduce the amount of printed information they provide and focus more on online bus information.

The Sustainable Transport Team is also undertaking a review, through One Connect into the future development of a central hub for all bus service information, rather than the many separate access points that currently exist.

3. Research objectives

The objective of this research was to find out if bus service information via the LCC online bus information website is:

- easily accessible;
- easily understandable;
- easily useable; and,
- can be used to make a journey between two places in Lancashire.

4. Methodology

The fieldwork was carried out by mystery shoppers. The mystery shoppers were recruited by LCC's Organisational Development, Customer Focus Team. Thirteen mystery shoppers (although questionnaires were only received back from eleven) were asked to plan a specified journey and record their findings based on one of three scenarios:

Scenario 1 required searching for a specified bus journey using the LCC website.

Scenario 2 required searching for a specified bus journey via the internet without the method being specified.

Scenario 3 required searching for a specified journey via the LCC website and then carrying out the journey.

A different journey was given to each mystery shopper, in total:

- 4 carried out scenario 1
- 3 carried out scenario 2
- 4 carried out scenario 3

The scenarios can be found in appendix 1. The mystery shoppers recorded their findings on a questionnaire and returned them for analysis. The questionnaires can be seen in appendix 2, 3 and 4.

This methodology was chosen because it enabled mystery shoppers to plan an online bus journey and then evaluate it. This therefore allowed us to gain a real life understanding of users' experiences, which would not have been possible through the use of focus groups or interviews.

4.1. Limitations

The nature of mystery shopping, and indeed qualitative research in general, means that only a small number of respondents from the population in Lancashire can participate. This means that this research does not offer results that are statistically representative for all people in Lancashire; they only offer indicative or illustrative results. Results are therefore attributed to participants only and not the wider public.

The advantage, however, of mystery shopping is that respondent's can carry out a specific task or tasks and report back on their actual experience.

4.2. Who conducted this research?

The research was conducted by Caroline Bradley on behalf of the Sustainable Transport Team, Lancashire County Council.

4.3. Fieldwork dates

The fieldwork was conducted between February 2012 and March 2012.

5. Main research findings

5.1. Easily accessible

All the mystery shoppers who were asked to access the LCC website were able to do so. The majority of mystery shoppers used the search engine Google and found the LCC website displayed on the first page of search results. Once they had accessed the LCC website it took the majority of the mystery shoppers two minutes and three clicks to find the link to the online bus information website. However, it took one mystery shopper five minutes and another ten minutes to locate the link as they found the homepage confusing.

One mystery shopper accessed the online bus information website via the A-Z index on the LCC website. They commented that the online bus timetable link was situated under 'd', 'download timetables and bus service information' and they felt this could confuse users as the key letter is 't' not 'd'.

For scenario 2, where mystery shoppers were not directed onto the LCC website, only one mystery shopper accessed the LCC website to locate the information but could not find it so searched another source.

5.2. Easily useable

The mystery shoppers were then asked a number of questions designed to identify how useable they found the website.

5.2.1. Navigating the website

Once on the online bus information website many of the mystery shoppers found it hard to navigate.

Table 1 - Would you consider it to be easy to navigate?

Yes	Partially	No
2	3	3

Base: only respondents to scenario one and three

Many felt frustrated navigating around the website and expressed a number of negative comments including 'a really dreadful experience' and 'visual clutter'. One mystery shopper commented that they found the website more difficult than they expected, as they were taken to the LCC website then they were redirected to an external site and finally back to the LCC website.

5.2.2. Ability to find the information specified in the brief

Not all of the mystery shoppers were able to find the information specified in the brief.

Table 2 - Were you able to find the information specified in the brief?

Yes	Partially	No
7	2	2

Base: all respondents

5.2.3. The presentation of the online bus service information website

The opinion was varied on whether mystery shoppers found the website well presented.

Table 3- Overall did you find the website well presented?

Yes	Partially	No
4	3	1

Base: only respondents to scenario one and three

The mystery shoppers who stated that they found the website well presented did not expand on their answer. However, negative comments were raised by those who felt that the website was partially or not well presented.

'I like what appears to be its relatively simple design. However, it is misleading as the links on the right totally confuse the eye and seem very arbitrarily placed ... I found I became very confused with too many prompts for too many classes of information and it took me (as someone who uses the internet daily) 20 minutes to complete my planning due to this' - *Mystery shopper 2 scenario 3*

'It was ok but not punchy and quite small print (for those with a slight visual impairment)'- *Mystery shopper 2 scenario 1*

The 'website was a bit bland' - *Mystery shopper 1 scenario 3*

5.2.4. The presentation of the Traveline website

The online bus information website links to the Traveline website on which users can plan a journey using the search facility. Most mystery shoppers felt that the Traveline journey planner was very useful but they noted a number of issues with it.

'Not as easy as it should be to work out how to plan the time of arrival; once you find your way it is easy' - *Mystery shopper 3 scenario 1*

'There were a number of acronyms which I didn't understand eg o/s and opp after bus stops. This added time to the journey and could have been avoided if I knew what they meant' - *Mystery shopper 2 scenario 1*

One mystery shopper commented that they were repeatedly taken back to the home page on the Traveline website when they entered their information which resulted in them having to repeat the process.

5.3. Easily understandable

The mystery shoppers were finally asked to report how easy they found it to understand the information on the LCC online bus information website.

5.3.1. Understanding the information on the online bus information website

Many mystery shoppers reported that they did not find the information on the website clear and easy to understand.

Table 4 - Was the information included on the website clear and easy to understand?

Yes	No	No answer
5	5	1

Base: all respondents

One mystery shopper suggested that the website should be redesigned:

'Remove most of the patronising blurb from the homepage explaining about site. Good clear design and well worded links makes this visual/verbal 'clutter' unnecessary. The reader can then get straight to the point – if they want a timetable, they just not need to go to a link to 'timetables'- *Mystery shopper 2, scenario 3.*

5.3.2. The clarity of the website

The results show that the majority of mystery shoppers felt that the website made it clear how to access further information.

Table 5 - Did the website make it clear how to access further information if you needed it?

Yes	No	No answer
8	2	1

Base: all respondents

5.4. To gather feedback on the overall journey experience from departure to arrival after accessing online information

The majority of the mystery shoppers who undertook scenario 3, which required them to undertake a bus journey, found the journey experience acceptable with the bus journeys arriving within a few minutes of the expected time.

However, one mystery shopper noted a problem concerning the cost of journeys. The online journey planner provided by Traveline does not take into account buying saver tickets. A bus driver advised one mystery shopper that the bus route they had been advised to undertake by the online journey planner would have cost them twice as much as another route, using buses from the same provider, as they would be able to buy a day ticket instead of having to buy a number of single tickets.

6. Conclusions

6.1. LCC online bus information website

The findings suggest that those who were instructed to use the online bus service information website through the LCC website found this straightforward. However some problems occurred when they commenced searching around the website to identify their bus times.

The majority found the presentation of the website unclear as they struggled to navigate around the website and this frustrated some users.

6.2. Traveline website

Difficulties were highlighted with the Traveline online journey planner which the LCC online bus information website has a link to. These included saver tickets not being shown, the use of acronyms on the journey route and the Traveline website reverting back to the homepage on one occasion when details were entered.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations have come from the mystery shoppers' experience when using the online bus information website:

7.1. Links on the A-Z index

- It is recommended that the links on the A-Z index on the LCC website could be reviewed. At the present online bus timetables are situated under 'd', 'download timetables and bus service changes' which is not the most intuitive heading.

7.2. Redesigning the website

- The LCC website needs to be made clearer by removing the visual clutter. Currently, there are too many prompts for classes of information resulting in confusion when navigating the website. This could be improved by reducing the number of links, focusing on key information and rearranging the links into the centre of the web page.

7.3. Traveline online journey

- It is recommended that the Sustainable Transport Team reports back the positive comments to Traveline but also highlights the suggestions for improvement and the potential problem identified by one mystery shopper.
- One suggestion is the possibility of the online planner identifying routes where saver tickets can be purchased.

- The potential problem which needs to be explored is why on one occasion when details were entered on the Traveline journey planner it reverted back to the Traveline homepage.

Appendix 1- Scenario 1:1 Planning a bus journey from Preston Railway Station to Leyland, Towngate, leaving Preston at 22:00

Website

Background

You want to plan a bus journey from Preston Railway Station to Leyland, Towngate, leaving Preston at 22:00 using the Lancashire County Council Website.

Accessing the Information

Familiarise yourself with the feedback sheet. Access your internet browser and search for the Lancashire County Council website.

- Once you are on the Lancashire County Council website search for 'bus timetable information'
- Plan a journey from Preston Railway Station to Leyland, Towngate, leaving Preston at 22:00.
- Were you able to locate the relevant information
- Record approximately how long it took you to access this information, how accessible the information was, how easy it was to understand the information you have been given and suggestions for the future in accordance with the feedback sheet.

Scenario 1:2 Planning a bus journey from Penwortham Library to Kirkham Market Square to arrive at 09:30

Background

You want to plan a bus journey from Penwortham Library to Kirkham Market Square to arrive at 9:30 using the Lancashire County Council website.

Accessing the Information

Familiarise yourself with the feedback sheet. Access your internet browser and search for the Lancashire County Council website.

- Once you are on the Lancashire County Council website search for 'bus timetable information'
- Plan a journey from Penwortham Library to Kirkham Market Square to get there for 09:30
- Were you able to locate the relevant information
- Record approximately how long it took you to access this information, how accessible the information was, how easy it was to understand the information you have been given and suggestions for the future in accordance with the feedback sheet.

Scenario 1:3 Planning a bus journey from Tarleton to Lytham Square to arrive at Lytham for 10:00

Background

You want to plan a bus journey from Tarleton to Lytham Square to get to Lytham for 10:00 using the Lancashire County Council website.

Accessing the Information

Familiarise yourself with the feedback sheet. Access your internet browser and search for the Lancashire County Council website.

- Once you are on the Lancashire County Council website search for 'bus timetable information'
- Plan a journey from Tarleton to Lytham Square to get to Lytham for 10:00am
- Were you able to locate the relevant information
- Record approximately how long it took you to access this information, how accessible the information was, how easy it was to understand the information you have been given and suggestions for the future in accordance with the feedback sheet.

Scenario 1:4 Planning a bus journey from Barrowford to Bacup to arrive at 13:30

Background

You want to plan a bus journey from Barrowford to Bacup to arrive at 13:30 using the Lancashire County Council website.

Accessing the Information

Familiarise yourself with the feedback sheet. Access your internet browser and search for the Lancashire County Council website.

- Once you are on the Lancashire County Council website search for 'bus timetable information'
- Plan a journey from Barrowford to Bacup to arrive at 13:30
- Were you able to locate the relevant information
- Record approximately how long it took you to access this information, how accessible the information was, how easy it was to understand the information you have been given and suggestions for the future in accordance with the feedback sheet.

Scenario 2:1 Planning a bus journey from Preston Bus Station to Fleetwood Freeport leaving at 09:45

Website

Background

You want to plan a journey from Preston Bus Station to Fleetwood Freeport leaving at 9:45

Accessing the Information

Familiarise yourself with the feedback sheet.

- Access your internet browser and search for the bus times from Preston Bus Station to Fleetwood Freeport leaving at 9:45
- Were you able to locate the relevant information
- Record the steps you followed to find the information you required, how long it took you to find the information and how easily did you find the information in accordance with the feedback sheet.

Scenario 2:2 Planning a bus journey from Coppull to Royal Preston Hospital for an appointment at 10:15.

Website

Background

You want to plan a journey from Coppull to Royal Preston Hospital for an appointment at 10:15.

Accessing the Information

Familiarise yourself with the feedback sheet.

- Access your internet browser and search for the bus times from Coppull to Royal Preston Hospital for an appointment at 10:15.
- Were you able to locate the relevant information
- Record the steps you followed to find the information you required, how long it took you to find the information and how easily did you find the information in accordance with the feedback sheet.

Scenario 2:4 Planning a bus journey from Burnley, Pike Hill to Rawtenstall Town Centre to arrive by 19:00

Website

Background

You want to plan a journey from Burnley, Pike Hill to Rawtenstall Town Centre to arrive by 19:00.

Accessing the Information

Familiarise yourself with the feedback sheet.

- Access your internet browser and search for the bus times from Burnley, Pike Hill to Rawtenstall Town Centre to arrive by 19:00.
- Were you able to locate the relevant information
- Record the steps you followed to find the information you required, how long it took you to find the information and how easily did you find the information in accordance with the feedback sheet.

Scenario 3:1 Planning and taking a journey from Lancaster Bus Station to Garstang to arrive by 10:00

Website and carrying out a journey

Background

You want to plan and carry out a journey from Lancaster Bus Station to Garstang to arrive for 10:00 by using the Lancashire County Council website.

Accessing the information

Familiarise yourself with the feedback sheet. Access your internet browser and search for the Lancashire County Council website.

- Once you are on the Lancashire County Council website search for 'bus timetable information'
- Plan a journey from Lancaster Bus Station to Garstang to get there for 10:00
- Were you able to locate the relevant information
- Record approximately how long it took you to access the information, how accessible the information is, how easy it is to understand the information you have been given and suggestions for the future in accordance with the feedback sheet
- Carry out the journey and whilst you are carrying out the journey make a note of whether the bus turned up, how easily you found to follow the instructions given and your overall experience of the journey in accordance with the feedback sheet.

Scenario 3:2 Planning and taking a journey from Preston Fishergate Centre to Longton to arrive by 09:00

Website and carrying out a journey

Background

You want to plan and carry out a journey from Preston Fishergate Centre to Longton to arrive by 09:00 by using the Lancashire County Council website.

Accessing the information

Familiarise yourself with the feedback sheet. Access your internet browser and search for the Lancashire County Council website.

- Once you are on the Lancashire County Council website search for 'bus timetable information'
- Plan a journey from Preston Fishergate Centre to Longton to arrive by 09:00.
- Were you able to locate the relevant information
- Record approximately how long it took you to access the information, how accessible the information is, how easy it is to understand the information you have been given and suggestions for the future in accordance with the feedback sheet
- Carry out the journey and whilst you are carrying out the journey make a note of whether the bus turned up, how easily you found to follow the instructions given and your overall experience of the journey in accordance with the feedback sheet.

Scenario 3:3 Planning and taking a journey from Burscough Bridge to Chorley and District Hospital to arrive for 10:00

Website and carrying out a journey

Background

You want to plan and carry out a journey from Burscough Bridge to Chorley and District Hospital to arrive for 10:00 by using the Lancashire County Council website.

Accessing the information

Familiarise yourself with the feedback sheet. Access your internet browser and search for the Lancashire County Council website.

- Once you are on the Lancashire County Council website search for 'bus timetable information'
- Plan a journey from Burscough Bridge to Chorley and District Hospital to arrive for 10:00

- Were you able to locate the relevant information
- Record approximately how long it took you to access the information, how accessible the information is, how easy it is to understand the information you have been given and suggestions for the future in accordance with the feedback sheet
- Carry out the journey and whilst you are carrying out the journey make a note of whether the bus turned up, how easily you found to follow the instructions given and your overall experience of the journey in accordance with the feedback sheet.

Scenario 3:4 Planning and taking a journey from Baxenden Hollins Lane to Altham Business Park to arrive by 09:30

Website and carrying out a journey

Background

You want to plan and carry out a journey from Baxenden Hollins to Altham Business Park to arrive by 9:30 by using the Lancashire County Council website.

Accessing the information

Familiarise yourself with the feedback sheet. Access your internet browser and search for the Lancashire County Council website.

- Once you are on the Lancashire County Council website search for 'bus timetable information'
- Plan a journey from Baxenden Hollins to Altham Business Park to arrive by 9:30 using the Lancashire County Council website.
- Were you able to locate the relevant information
- Record approximately how long it took you to access the information, how accessible the information is, how easy it is to understand the information you have been given and suggestions for the future in accordance with the feedback sheet
- Carry out the journey and whilst you are carrying out the journey make a note of whether the bus turned up, how easily you found to follow the instructions given and your overall experience of the journey in accordance with the feedback sheet.

4.0 Further information

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