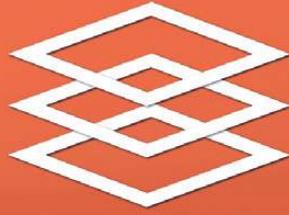


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UKRIA 2017



ACCELERATING DIGITAL IS KEY TO ENABLING A WORLD-CLASS RAIL SERVICE

Vicki Hayward writing on behalf of OnTrac and Nutshell discusses the importance for the rail industry to continue on its digital journey, and how mobile technology is already enabling innovation across the sector.

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Modern social demographic changes have set about a paradigm shift in the UK, affecting how we consider and connect with rail in our country. A national dialogue has been established in which commuters have increased demand for lower costs and greater reliability, as well as more comfort and connectivity from rail services provided. However, in a country gripped by long-term austerity, executing an industry-wide renaissance in a sector deep-rooted in the traditions of its inception poses unique challenges.

The announcement that train fares will increase by 2.3% from January 2017 has been met with controversy, and is perhaps what prompted transport secretary Chris Grayling's recent announcement regarding the overhaul of the rail network. Grayling has directly responded to consumer demand by announcing changes that aim to improve

services for passengers, requiring each rail franchise to be run by a joint management team incorporating both a representative from TOCs and Network Rail.

While an overhaul is welcome news, the reality isn't quite as simple. Historically, public perception of the rail sector, and the discourse surrounding it, has been predominantly one-sided. Consumers have made their demands heard, while the rail industry has not been vocal or transparent enough in highlighting the reasons behind fare increases. This is indicative of a disconnect between the reality and expectation of rail customers, rail services and the railways themselves – all of which are integral to any potential overhauls. If the transport secretary's plan is to be successful, this needs to be recognised, or the entire project may amount to nothing more than another added layer of bureaucracy to circumvent, in the facilitation of much needed changes.

Digital enablement is key

The railway infrastructure in the UK is the oldest on earth, and given its illustrious history, it's unsurprising that ageing railways and tunnels dating back to the Victorian era face unique problems that require industry acknowledgement before any commuter expectations can be met. Therefore, accelerating the digital modernisation of the entire rail network as a priority is key. Business leaders – and those vital to this new proposal – need to embrace the innovation and ingenuity provided by the digital revolution, and apply it to the industry's existing infrastruc-

ture and business process. Without this, the rail network will never become a service that truly supports consumer demand.

Since operations began, OnTrac has provided the rail industry with the means to utilise technology in the sector by implementing software that offers transformational changes to existing business processes. We have worked alongside key clients for almost a decade, with steadfast commitment to the delivery of substantial improvement in the sector – saving both time and money, as well as increasing the productivity of frontline staff.

Through our extensive market research, we discovered that, of the thousands of processes in rail, those which were paper-based would benefit most from digitisation. For example, one of our clients – a major construction company in rail – looked at the printing costs of one of its business processes. In this organisation, a single depot cost over £100,000 per annum in paper. By utilising OnTrac's software and moving these processes to a digital space, accessed via smartphone and tablet – from anywhere, including the tracks – the company saved money, streamlined efficiencies and aided the stimulation of growth within the sector.

Furthermore, OnTrac has used technology to automate client processes that include health, safety, environment and incident reporting across the Network Rail supply chain, by consolidating approximately 16,000 spreadsheets per month into a single digital space. While these paper-based spreadsheets were being used to collect



KPIs, it wasn't until they were digitised that they also added the benefit of allowing the industry to gather intelligence via analytics. By having this information digitised, times and locations of accidents, for example, could be predicted like never before.

OnTrac's suite of products empower frontline staff, allowing them to carry out their tasks in a safer and more productive manner. What's more, they have enabled business leaders to save money and stimulate economic growth during times of austerity, without relying on massively reducing headcount, or drastically changing procurement processes and strategies, to become more efficient.

It is through this experience of creating native mobile apps, with the aim of providing clients with more streamlined and efficient means of working on the go, that we realised the next natural direction for the rail industry to move towards was to go completely mobile.

Upon realising the gap in the market, however, the OnTrac team acknowledged that going mobile would pose problems that directly conflicted with our core ethos. The available options at the time involved rapid development toolkits, mobile enterprise platforms and expensive solutions. Therefore, OnTrac decided to create a solution that the industry needed, without relying on expensive, heavy-code dependent software.

Thus, Nutshell Apps was born. A no-code, drag and drop app building platform that

has been utilised by a range of companies throughout a multitude of sectors, including the rail network.

By utilising Nutshell, companies can alter the efficiency and productivity of the teams and departments that use the platform – and the benefits are bountiful. Time spent waiting for sign-offs, for example, or time-consuming interdepartmental processes, lost or damaged paperwork etc. are all overcome with Nutshell Apps, making it a perfect fit for the rail industry.

Using the Nutshell platform, Network Rail has created apps that allow frontline construction staff the ability to monitor and test the hand/arm vibrations of a job and have digitised their construction diaries and task briefs. The latter pulls data from OnTrac's Connect component, blending the innovation of both companies together into an app that benefits frontline staff in being more productive and safe in their work.

Furthermore, Nutshell has enabled Network Rail to create apps that drastically improve the safety of staff, such as group inspection apps, manual handling apps, a record of site safety, an environmental observation app and a hot work permit app.

The Nutshell platform has been well-received by rail clients thus far, and with its recent UKRIA award nomination in the 'Mobile Technology' category, this success is something the team are seeking to continue, as more of the rail network adopt the platform to solve their enterprise mobility needs.

Rail industry must continue mobile adoption

The world has gone mobile, and it is imperative for the rail industry to continue its adoption of mobile technology, to carry out essential infrastructure reform that will not only improve the health, safety and productivity of those working on the tracks, but the comfort and experience of customers using the rail network.

The benefits of using Nutshell to create enterprise apps that cut costs, boost productivity and place frontline staff within the future of work – today – is immeasurable. Network Rail is now able to reduce the risks of manual entry errors; they can respond faster and lower maintenance costs across their services, allowing them to carry out essential infrastructure work that wouldn't be possible without utilising the software that Nutshell and OnTrac continue to provide.

OnTrac and Nutshell remain committed to our historic rail industry, and remain passionate about providing solutions that help close the gaps between services, infrastructure and consumers. As the transport secretary's overhaul plans come to fruition, both OnTrac and Nutshell want to be instrumental in helping our clients create a world-class rail service.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

W: www.on-trac.co.uk

W: www.nutshellapps.co.uk