

Joint Rewards Card and Transport Ticketing with WiganPlus

WiganPlus was a research and demonstration project delivered in Wigan between 2008 and 2013.

It delivered a joint retail rewards, transport ticketing and citizen smart-card for the town.

Local people used the card to obtain discounts at local shops and services and businesses made offers to attract more customers.



How it Started

The Future of Retail Property was the largest collaborative research programme ever undertaken by the retail industry in the UK. DHC led the transport theme and the ground breaking report "Access Information and Flexibility" suggested how a sustainable future for transport and the economy could emerge.

Published in 2006 the report suggested that the best way to shape the future was to deliver it so, a pilot project was designed to enable better informed, lower cost travel using flexible smart ticketing approaches. DHC in partnership with Arri-va, Modus Properties, Drumbeat Creative and Fortress successfully applied for funding under the Technology Strategy Board's 'informed personal travel' competition to improve access, information and flexibility for the residents of Wigan. The "Customer Relationships in Shopper Travel Decisions" project was subsequently launched in 2008.



Information and Rewards

The project aimed to inform and reward participants so that they would make more local shopping trips by walking and bus, capturing retail spending that might otherwise have gone to car dependent out of town centres.

Central to the approach was an integrated citizen and rewards card. Users could sign up for the card at local

The approach rewarded users who made sustainable, profitable travel choices

shops and through partner organisations such as the Council and sports clubs. Users could then access a personal dashboard with offers and incentives from local businesses and agencies.

A Universal Smartcard for a Town

The smartcard could be read directly by enabled smartcard readers but a key part of the technology design was to integrate existing technologies allowing users to choose the technology they liked best.

The smartcards were printed with a barcode unique to each user and a magnetic stripe, to allow linkages with retailer EPOS systems and Council leisure and library systems respectively. Shops without barcode readers could still use the system by recording the user card number at the point of sale. Buses and parking locations without smartcard readers could use printed vouchers and codes to participate in travel rewards and offers.

Touch screen terminals were provided throughout the town where users could read about offers and print vouchers. A mobile smartphone app was also developed allowing offers to be viewed and mobile tickets and vouchers to be used rather than smart-cards.



How the System Worked

Transport operators and retailers in Wigan were able to load offers on the system which were then bundled and marketed to users by the WiganPlus project team.



Users could only receive these offers by signing up and providing some details about themselves. This meant that transport operators and retailers could be sure they were only giving the most attractive deals to attract new custom. The personalised marketing approaches enabled the best deals to be targeted to deliver sustainable and profitable approaches. The most attractive bus travel offers were for mobile bus tickets rather than using smartcards to encourage the use of smart m-tickets which involved lower administration costs than cards.

During the pilot period, 5950 people signed up for smartcards. These were issued mainly by post and from the WiganPlus shop which was set up in the town centre as a community hub. In addition, season ticket smartcard holders at Wigan Athletic football club had their cards enabled to allow them to use the WiganPlus services. Cards could be scanned by barcode readers, smartcard readers and magnetic stripe readers, or card numbers entered to the provider dashboard manually so that each transaction was recorded on the WiganPlus server regardless of the technology used.

Use of the System

The most widely used offer was for discounted shopper parking with over 22,000 vouchers being redeemed. Free parking was also used as an incentive to encourage take up of other offers, particularly bus use. Some people used the bus on weekdays in order to gain eligibility for free parking at weekends. This encouraged bus use when the roads were congested, and local shopping at weekends when car drivers might have shopped elsewhere.

Small local shops made more use of the system than major retailers who already had their own rewards cards. Printed vouchers were the most common way for claiming and redeeming offers since most small shops did not have suitable technology to read smartcards.

Lessons from the Research

The research was funded by the Technology Strategy Board until September 2011 but local companies in the town decided to continue the scheme after this period, funding it from their marketing budgets. However, by June 2013 the costs of maintaining the system and updating the technologies could not be prioritised, so the scheme was replaced with a less integrated approach to offers and incentives managed directly by each shopping centre and transport operator. WiganPlus ceased to operate as an independent initiative.

The research showed that integrating technologies in a town for payment and rewards is technologically feasible but is more expensive than can be justified by the benefits. Reducing the level of integration substantially reduces the operating costs. The success of the combined offers showed that targeted integration is a highly effective way to encourage customers of one sector or mode of transport to make behaviour changes in another.



Technology Strategy Board funding enabled the research to test the integration of payment and rewards cards and services in Wigan.

It found that well targeted integration influenced customers and delivered benefits for providers.

The integrated transport offers were by far the most popular, suggesting that these offered the best prospects for future viable commercial approaches.

Further information about the project and what was learned can be obtained from the address below.



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