



client story

Let's get engaged!

Communicating and engaging with the Greater Anglia workforce

by Sarah

*Greater*Anglia





The challenge

Abellio was awarded the franchise to run trains in the Anglia region and they had just over three months to get everything ready for action. It's fair to say that this time (known as the 'mobilisation' period) in a new rail franchise is hectic, what with setting up the new company, all the legal and financial stuff involved, coming up with a new brand identity and marketing campaign, making sure all the systems work so that passengers can buy tickets and travel on trains without any hiccups, etc.!

For employees, of course, this is a time of great uncertainty and many questions: who is this new company; what will change; will there be a new management structure; will there be staff cuts; will we get new uniforms; what about our terms and conditions; will there be investment in customers and trains; what will it mean for services; will we still use the same suppliers?

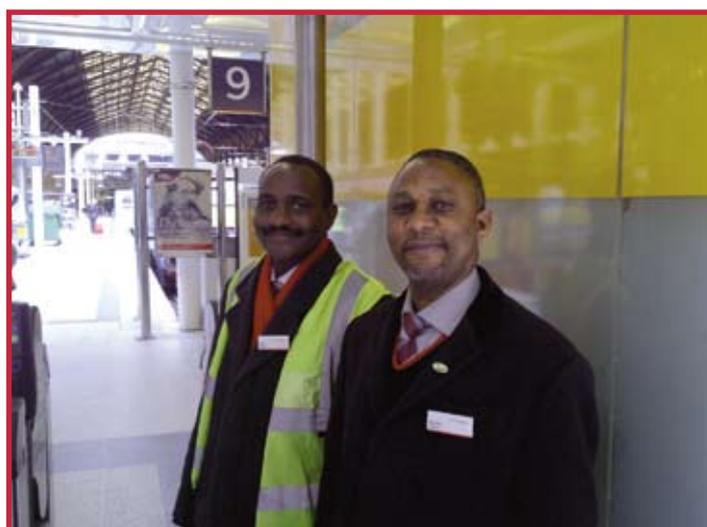
Abellio decided that it would invest in helping its future Greater Anglia employees to understand what the change meant, explain what the future held and answer their questions. In short, it decided to engage with them, and this is where Rambutan helped out.



Solution

Quite simply, we worked with Dave Welham, the HR lead, to put together a proper communication plan for engaging with frontline employees and then got stuck in to delivering that plan. Bear in mind that we didn't

have direct access to our audience because at this time they were still employees of the former franchise holder!



We decided to build a website, which acted as a hub of information and other communication channels, and to find ways of letting people know of its existence. On the website were:

- a fortnightly electronic newsletter
- dedicated email address to submit questions and get a personal response
- a regularly updated 'Q&A' based on the email queries
- dates for face-to-face roadshows, which we held about 30 times at 11 different locations so that as many people as possible could take part

Ruud Haket, the Bid Director, saw the roadshows as being crucial in building relationships with his future colleagues and in building confidence in Abellio as an organisation: he presented Abellio's plans for the



franchise, answered people's questions frankly and took time to respond to people's concerns.

The head office team had to move to new offices on the first day of operations, so we took the opportunity to provide them with clear communications about the practical bits and bobs involved, and got some of them to come along and visit the new offices being prepared to see for themselves where they'd be moving to (they passed on the good news to colleagues - the good old grapevine!).

One of the principles of all this communication activity was that anything we did during the mobilisation period would be carried on into 'business as usual' activity in the franchise, which is what's happening now.



Result

When Abellio took over the Greater Anglia franchise the amount of goodwill and engagement was almost overwhelming. This was as a result of all the hard work that the bid team had put into communication and engagement in the critical (and busy!) mobilisation period.

In our wildest dreams we hoped that we'd get to meet one in five future employees face-to-face; that was the wild dream and we thought the reality would be closer to one in eight. In fact, 26% of employees (780 people) came along to one of the roadshows and a few came twice! Some who came along started using social media to encourage other colleagues to attend - it went viral! There were tonnes of positive notes on the feedback cards and not a single negative one. Here's a flavour:

- "Very impressed, I enjoyed the presentation and was pleased with the responses to questions."
- "Interesting; I was made to feel an important part of the upcoming changes."
- "Really informative and reassuring, it put a lot of minds at ease."

Employees submitted hundreds of questions by email and every single one got a personal response from somebody in the bid team. One extraordinarily useful by-product of this process was that some unknown issues came to light that, had they stayed hidden, would have affected either employee morale or business continuity once the new franchise started.

Here are some of the comments that we received during the first fortnight of the franchise, which we were pretty chuffed to bits with:

- "The benefits of the work you have done are becoming clearer by the day," Charles Vicary, who oversaw the entire mobilisation work and made this comment after the franchise had started
- "I have been very impressed with the style, tone and openness of all the communications I have received so far. It is a real breath of fresh air and just what we need, thanks." A manager at Greater Anglia
- "I wanted to say the briefs that are sent out are probably the most comprehensive and helpful updates I've ever had and are a real help - thank you" An employee at Greater Anglia.



Testimonial

“The communication plan was an overwhelming success – literally! The tone of the communications set the scene perfectly; it was informal, friendly and did not duck difficult questions. Employees were printing at home and making available to colleagues which prompted more to attend the roadshows. When we were out on the roadshows we were asked more questions, when the next update was etc. and these were quickly added to the Q&A site. The employee thirst for information and reassurance was so great it was tough keeping up.

The plan and support we had from Sarah and the Rambutan team was fantastic; they challenged, wrote and checked our messages, ensuring they were honest and transparent. One misplaced comment could have opened a can of worms (as some Twitter users have found to their cost!).

When we took over the franchise, staff engagement was already considerable - we were able to hit the ground running fast and implement plans without having to do much more introduction or explaining. There was a massive amount of goodwill for us as the new operator and the

value from having coherent and logical communications cannot be over-stated. Thank you Rambutan!”

Dave Welham, Head of HR UK Bid Team at Abellio



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