

Response To Retail Market Review For Selling Tickets

About Myself

I am 66, was widowed in 2007 and lost my youngest son to pancreatic cancer in 2010. Then, I had a serious stroke, which meant due to reduced eyesight, I had to give up driving my car.

So I sold up in Suffolk and moved to where most of my ancestors were born and lived; Dalston in East London.

I travel extensively using my Freedom Pass and Senior Railcard to advantage, wherever possible.

I'm also filling in the bits of Europe that my wife and I didn't see during her lifetime. Typically, I'll fly somewhere worth visiting and then return by train. So I have seen the best and the worst of Europe's trains, ticketing and customer service.

I also have a unique insight into the UK's railways, in that in 2011 to raise money for pancreatic cancer research at my old university of Liverpool, I visited every football ground in the Premier and Football Leagues in alphabetical order by public transport.

I'm more or less retired now, but I still work on innovative projects and ideas.

I blog about my experiences as The Anonymous Widower on Wordpress.

My Current Train Usage

I generally use the trains, two or three times a week, outside of the Transport for London Zone 6 Area. Journeys are often concerned with following my football team, Ipswich Town, where I am a Season Ticket Holder.

Until recently, picking up tickets meant that I had to do this at a mainline station, but as of the last few months, I have been able to do this at my local station of Dalston Junction.

This small improvement has made my purchase of tickets on-line, a lot more convenient and a great deal easier.

I should say that I have always been an extensive user of trains, so I know the UK network and the rules on ticketing very well.

Improving The System

I set myself up for a comfortable retirement, by designing one of the project management computer systems in the 1970s, which laid down the principles for managing large projects.

So I do have some strong views on improving the ticketing process, which I feel would be to the benefit of passengers and all companies involved in the rail industry.

The Orange Tickets

I see no reason to abandon the credit card sized orange tickets. In my travels across Europe, you see all sorts of other types of ticket and none are as convenient.

I should say that my left arm was badly broken by the school bully and I tend to do everything with my right hand, especially after the stroke, which didn't help. I doubt I could work a smart phone based ticketing system, without causing a lot of delay at ticket gates.

I would like to see more pickup points for tickets, but I suspect, when Transport for London bring in the next generation of ticket machines, they will dispense rail tickets, just as the Overground ticket machines now do.

If there were more pickup points, would this encourage more people to buy train tickets on line?

Smart Phones

I do have a smart phone, but I don't use it in the ticketing process in any way.

I think that to rely on all passengers having a smart phone would be a step too far!

Especially, as I lost mine recently at Gatwick Airport and how would that have affected my ticketing?

Ticketing Web Sites

I always buy tickets direct from the train company, with whom I'm travelling, as I generally find that this is the way to get the cheapest ticket. I also once booked with a well-known agency, and it was the devil's own job to stop their junk e-mails. That was a couple of years ago, so things might be better now.

I would prefer that the various train companies used a consistent layout and set of principles, as on one recently, that I don't use regularly, I bought the wrong ticket.

Global Accounts

Most ticketing web sites allow you to register using just an e-mail address and a password.

I would like to see a global account and profile that worked with all the train companies, so that the ticketing process is as fast as possible on a site that you rarely use.

A global account might have other benefits to passengers and rail companies

1. It would surely enable those who claimed the tickets on expenses or against their tax to print a consolidated statement of all their train journeys.
2. I recently claimed a refund, after a line was blocked due to the storms. I hadn't kept my ticket, but I was able to find the e-mail receipt and I got my refund. A global Account would make claiming for non-performance easier.

Pick Up Codes

Why do pick up codes have to be so complicated?

I have difficulty memorising them and sometimes write them down wrongly.

I would like to see ticketing web sites allow the passenger to put in their own pick up code.

That would surely speed up the process of collecting tickets.

Time Before Tickets Can Be Picked Up

It used to be that you had to wait a couple of hours before you could pick up a ticket that had been purchased on-line.

I think that has been reduced in the last year or so, but is enough work being done to reduce this delay to the absolute minimum?

Too Many Railcards

I use a Senior Railcard and on ticketing web sites, the list of acceptable railcards is endless, with the Senior Railcard in a different place on each web site.

This is handled much better on the ticket machines, but surely the railcard system could be simplified on ticketing web sites.

Why for instance, doesn't my profile on the web site, remember that I have a Senior Railcard and also prompt me to renew it, at the right time of the year?

Off Peak Single Tickets

When I go to the football at Ipswich, I usually buy a First Class Senior Off-Peak Return, which I buy on the GreaterAnglia web site. This enables me to say have a meal before I travel and on a Saturday catch either the 13:00 or 13:30 train to Ipswich. Coming back, I usually get the first train after the match, or if I have a drink or a meal, one after a couple of hours.

If I had to book a particular train, it might be cheaper, but I would lose the flexibility of choosing my trains at the last minute.

With Virgin Trains, which I use regularly, I generally book a specific train out of London in First and book a Standard Off Peak Single to return to London from their web site.

Recently, on a return from Blackpool, because I just missed a connection at Preston and I had a Standard Off-Peak Single, I was able to change plans and use the ticket to go home via Manchester, where I got a much-needed supper in the station.

Some companies appear to restrict the selling of Off Peak Single tickets on their web sites. On my last trip to Leicester I had to buy my Standard Off Peak Ticket to return to London from a ticket machine. I'd travelled to Leicester using a First Advance Single.

Multiple Advance Tickets

Football and other sports fans are part of a class of traveller, who do the same journey many times.

At the beginning of the season, it would be ideal if I can buy a dozen or so undated return tickets to Ipswich and use them as required. It would avoid buying and picking up individual tickets, although the train company would have my money for longer.

Payment Cards And Contactless Bank Cards

Transport for London has declared its aim of removing cash payment from buses and it would be likely that in the next few years, cash would have virtually disappeared from the rail system in London. Other conurbations like Merseyside are probably going the same way.

So will we see the day when to travel on a local train say from say Felixstowe to Ipswich, you can just touch your bank card in at one station and out at the other?

Perhaps, if like me you have a Senior Railcard, you can associate your bank card with the Railcard to get the discount?

Obviously in my example, the cost of the ticket is small, but I find in my travels that I buy quite a few local tickets, that cost under £10.

PlusBus

As I am over sixty and have a bus pass, I never buy a PlusBus ticket.

But I regularly use buses to get to my final destination.

Only a few railway stations outside London have comprehensive information on which bus to take and how to catch it.

I always use the hospital test. If one of my relatives or friends was in the hospital in say Middlesbrough, can I arrive at the station and immediately find out how to get to the hospital.

You can find out, if you're an experienced web user before you travel, but how many people give up and drive?

Walking Routes From Stations

This has improved dramatically in recent years, with many cities and some large towns providing walking maps in the city centre, which show major landmarks, attractions and buildings.

But there are still some cities, where they assume you have a smart phone or know where you're going.

Visits To Events/Attractions

As someone, who can't drive, I regularly use the train to get to attractions and events outside of London.

But I think in common with many, I would purchase my travel separately from the event.

What I need is good information on how to use the trains on the web site for the attraction or event and better information at the nearest train station.

Are the appropriate digital tools available from the Rail Industry for use by web site designers for events, to make attending an easier process?

Is there a web site, which lists attractions that are easily visited by train?

International Issues

Because of my blog, which sometimes discusses train travel in the UK and Europe, I've had several people from outside of the UK, ask me what is the best way to buy tickets before they leave home.

Are the ticketing web sites, easy-to-use from outside of the UK?

Ticket Machines

I don't really have too many problems with ticket machines in the UK.

I did regularly use a machine at Whittlesford Parkway, that was difficult to read on a sunny day, but issues like that seem to have decreased and I can't remember the last time I had difficulty reading or using a ticket machine.

The worst ticket machines, I ever came across were those in The Netherlands, which could only be used with a Dutch debit card. How tourist-friendly is that?

From...To Ticketing

I regularly make multiple trips around the country. Recently, I went from London to Birmingham to see a supplier and after lunch, I went to Liverpool Lime Street, where I met a friend. Later I took a train from Liverpool to Preston. I bought the first two legs of the journey on the Internet and was going to buy the last ticket at Lime Street.

However, I arrived at Birmingham New Street in good time and it would have been a good idea to be able to buy my Liverpool to Preston ticket then.

Some European ticket machines allow you to specify your starting point, and although it is only a small thing, it might help in the sale of multiple leg journeys.

Publicise The Rules

A few times a year, I will break a journey, so that I can visit two friends or clients on a single journey.

I asked on a recent trip to Margate by South Eastern's High Speed service, if it would be possible to break the return journey at Canterbury. The answer was yes, but I was surprised how many people I met on the trip, didn't know that this was possible.

Journey Information

On Saturday, I went to Ipswich to see play at Portman Road. As I always do I bought a Senior First Class Off-Peak Return. I travel first on this route, as I like to sit in a comfortable Mk 3 coach, with free wi-fi and a complimentary drink.

But I was not informed at the time of booking, or at any time before I travelled, that due to engineering works, I would be travelling in a rather tired Class 321 both ways, with only rudimentary First Class, no wi-fi and no café bar.

Buy a jumper on-line from some of our large chain stores and the delivery process is fully documented by timely e-mails.

But rail companies do not use the information, they have about your ticket to give customer information!

They could do a lot better!

Never Underestimate The Power Of Computer Software

I programmed computers for forty years and understand the art of the possible from good computer systems and programmers.

If you have a possible application and don't ask, you don't get!

James Miller