



Carolyn, Marketing Manager, First Bus Aberdeen

Here Carolyn shares an insight into her role, the efforts to keep customers informed on the services running and help ensure workers could make essential journeys easily during lockdown.

"I'm the Marketing Manager for First Bus Scotland East & Bright Bus Tours. Scotland East covers a wide area including Aberdeen, Falkirk, Stirling, West Lothian, Bannockburn and lots of other wee pockets in between.

My role as the Marketing Manager for those areas means I'm responsible for the information that reaches our customers, which includes travel information, maps and simple how-to information, as well as campaigns to encourage people to use the bus for different travel motivations including work and leisure.

Some people have a dated perception of public transport, but the reality is when you actually take a step back and look at some of the steps that have been taken in recent years to really up the game with public transport and the fleet that we operate now then there's a big difference. Some of the key messages that we're able to communicate to people are really powerful and it helps them realise that public transport is a very different product and service to what they might imagine - and it's great to be able to contribute to changing those perceptions.

The past year has been very much dedicated to making sure people have got the most important and basic travel information which comes down to when services are running, what the guidance is and a general update as the landscape changed at such speed and we've continued to really follow and echo government advice in order to make sure our passengers are equipped with all the information they need.

When we do get back to more proactive marketing, when restrictions ease and the 'stay at home' restrictions lift, I think it'll be very interesting to understand how people's habits and behaviours have changed as a result of the lockdown and it's an opportunity for us to encourage

people to factor bus and more sustainable travel into their plans. As part of what has been a big reset for so many people, I for one will be more conscious of my impact on the environment and I think others will too.

Previously my role fundamentally came down to getting bums on seats and getting people to take the bus, whether for work, leisure, or other reasons. When the pandemic hit and the immediate message was to stay at home, don't go anywhere and don't travel, it was very strange for us because suddenly our messaging changed from all the reasons you should get the bus to saying don't get the bus, stay at home! But if you need to get the bus, here is the information that you need to know.

So it really went against the grain. It wasn't something we were used to doing but I think all the operators recognised just how important it was that we really pushed out those key government messages and those Key Safety messages. So my role very quickly switched to a much less commercially focused role and more information led - covering key customer information making sure it went out as quickly as possible as things continually evolved.

We, like many operators operated reduced services in line with a reduction in demand - normally a process that we operate over around 90 days in the lead up to a service change. To suddenly switch to information and schedules which were changing weekly, there were a lot of quick turnarounds that we had to react to with speed. This was a huge 'all hands-on deck' scenario, where our network team in particular dedicated many weekends and late nights.

These changes or reductions took place in a staggered manner, as we matched the demand for travel with the service level we operated. A key piece that informed those service levels was led by really taking time to understand exactly what our customers needs were.

Despite the lockdown, so many key workers still needed to make essential journeys, and we needed to make sure that those vital services were operating in line with their shifts and routines.

The gathering of this feedback took the form of key worker feedback via our website, which allowed key workers to submit their specific journey detail: where did they start and where did they end their journey? Their reason for travel and any issues they had with our schedule. I collated this information and shared it with the network

team, and they used this information to inform our next wave of changes.

We made various tweaks along the way and obviously we couldn't do it for every detail shared, but the team really did their best to take into account the needs of our customers.

To give an example of how we used this feedback:

There was an instance I saw, where we were contacted by care home staff who let us know that their shift ended at 8pm and our bus was leaving five minutes before so we were able to change the time for people that worked there and that's the sort of information that we would never be able to get before because of the volume of passengers that we had. Whereas now, because it was based on those essential journeys and key workers, we were working collaboratively with their feedback to make sure that our service was relevant to them and get them to where they needed to go.

It was really quite difficult and emotive at times reading all the feedback over the first lockdown, whether it related to how long someone's shift was and how far they had to walk to get to the bus, or perhaps help they needed making a connecting journey.

A small adjustment on our end, could equate to a real impact on their journey and to improve their day and experience in any way was something we were glad to be able to do to ensure that services were running for those who needed them."

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