

# A technology-led matching service with the needs of the rail industry at its heart

March 25, 2024



*In this guest writer article, [Lost Group](#) Co-Founder Alex Warner explains why the rail industry must change the way it recruits*

With complex challenges ahead, UK rail – an industry I love, and have worked in for over 30 years – cannot afford to be complacent. Instead, I believe it must change the way it behaves and presents itself.

That's why, after a long career, I'm more excited than ever to be involved in rail recruitment, as the Co-Founder of tech-led matching company Lost Group. It's an opportunity to bring the right people into rail, ensuring that talented individuals with strong values can move forward. And I hope that organisations will respond well to our approach; we're disruptors working for the good of the industry.

## A long career in transport

It's an industry I joined just over 30 years ago. I began my career at London Underground, before moving to British Airways, where I led on customer relations. Roles at the Strategic Rail Authority and a range of train operating companies followed; I ran the Stansted Express railway business and was the Retail

Director for South Eastern Trains, then Customer Services Director for Midland Main Line.

After a stint in the bus sector and with Royal Mail, I set up my own consultancy businesses, specialising in everything from strategic advice to training and recruitment. And then, in 2023, Lost Group was born. Co-Founder John McArthur and I are an effective double act; while he has rail experience, he's not a trainspotter like me, and views the industry with clarity.

That said, after three decades in rail, I can also look at it objectively - and John and I are united by our commitment to transforming the way the industry recruits. It's why we founded Lost Group, with its unique, technology and client-driven model.



Why caring about rail is key

And I consider those three decades in rail my USP. As a recruiter, I'd often held or line-managed the roles my clients were hiring for. I understood their perspective, having struggled with poorly performing individuals myself, and seen first hand what the right recruits could achieve - whether in an office, station, or depot. Often, a dose of realism is required. A candidate might be full of enthusiasm, but unprepared for the reality of a depot or station environment; will they be willing to turn their hand to some of the granular behind the scenes activity that are critical to keeping trains running but might not be core in their job description, are they going to be comfortable getting out and talking to customers often in real adversity, such as major service disruption? How will they fit with the sometimes unique and sometimes nuanced culture that prevails on the railway, warts and all and which can be very different by company or geography and is often extremely localised?

Indeed, when it comes to placing candidates, understanding rail is key – as is caring about it. It should be a case of helping organisations to identify those candidates who will drive the industry forward, rather than taking a ‘bums on seats’ approach – or perpetuating what I believe is a costly, inefficient, and subjective recruitment model. At Lost Group, we’re working with organisations that want to make a difference to the industry – which means changing that model radically.

#### A new model for rail recruitment

Lost Group’s tech-based model is driven, not by recruiters, but the customer, who can log into and peruse our database of rail candidates at their leisure. We’re able to give an objective, evidence-based diagnostic of CVs, looking at everything from career gaps to skills and experience. This ensures that clients have access to the right recruits.

And, where traditional headhunters might avoid putting candidates forward if they suspect a client won’t warm to them – perhaps because of the type of person they are – our model is more objective, supporting diversity and inclusion.

As the rail industry works to save money, it’s also more cost-efficient, helping organisations to hire the right people more quickly.

#### The future of rail

Working with like-minded clients, we hope to bring about a step-change in the way in which rail fills roles.

The industry has challenges and it’s not just a case of identifying and hiring the right candidates. Mentoring is also key.

In the past, aspiring young rail professionals had strong mentors and plenty of development opportunities. I believe that this is no longer the case, with good people leaving the industry – or failing to progress – as a result.

We need mechanisms to identify stars on the frontline. Only then, can we help them to move up the ladder, and into senior positions. It might be as simple as walking past an employee at a local station and saying, “She’s great, and we’re going to help her progress.”

I love public transport, and this industry has been my life. But if it is to overcome the potentially existential crisis it faces, I believe it must change its approach to recruitment. Lost Group is ready to play its part in this work.

