

# New arrival: the future of contactless train travel

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Two British tech disruptors - [Whoosh](#) and [Ordamo](#) - recently joined forces to improve rail journey experiences. Supporting COVID-safe train travel, their combined digital skills increase the capabilities of the recently launched, multi-functional platform, Real-Time Journey Dashboard.

Enhancing the customer experience before, during and after their journey, the new platform hands information to, and increases control for, passengers via their mobile phones.

Edmund Caldecott, Founder and CEO at [Whoosh](#), is an innovator and entrepreneur in transport technology. Having established Whoosh Media in 2012, Edmund has seen its success and is looking forward to overseeing the company as it launches into the Real-time Information sphere and revolutionises the customer experiences of train travel.

He has written the article below on the importance of the Real-Time Journey Dashboard.

“US billionaire John Sculley knows a thing or two about good fortune. Having been the boss of Pepsi (when it trumped Coke in the 1980s), and then Apple (when it pioneered home computing), it’s no surprise that

his famous quote – ‘Timing in life is everything’ – is the holy grail for entrepreneurs.

I’d never compare myself to him of course, but I get what he means. The line between business success and failure is a very fine one, and it is often very unusual external factors that determine how your dice roll.

In the COVID-19 world plenty of companies, and especially start-ups, will be wondering what on earth lies in store for them.

At Whoosh Media we’ve recently leapt into the world of rail with our new bit of passenger technology, Real-Time Journey Dashboard. Not ideal, I suppose, given traveller numbers have dropped off a cliff in the last 12 months. But timing is everything, and we do have some things to be thankful for.

Firstly, the system is accessed using QR codes. These funny little black-and-white squares had never really caught on in the UK before the pandemic, but their ‘contactless’ nature now means they are everywhere. Consumers are suddenly familiar with the notion of reaching specific websites or online content by scanning the codes with their smartphone cameras. Checking in to pubs, restaurants and other venues this way is likely to be the norm for months, if not years, to come so we’ve arrived at just the right time.

As an outsider, the rail sector looked a pretty innovative place to me when it came to the actual hardware – trains, signalling and the like. But as a passenger, it seemed the most fundamental issue – travel information and help – was stuck in the sidings.

Another of our businesses deals primarily with in-flight entertainment systems and delivering fun stuff like movies and audiobooks to travellers. But guess what? The most-viewed content for flyers is something far less exciting – it’s the little moving map that tracks the plane on its journey. Information is king, and that is the genesis of our system.

Real-Time Journey Dashboard gives customers tailored information about their particular journey. The individual QR code on your seatback ties specifically to your departure, and even where your seat is located in the carriage.

The simple interface offers access to a real-time journey map, with precise details of on-time performance. Any delays can be highlighted, with messages ‘pushed’ to users – let’s call it a virtual tannoy announcement. Sheep on the line? Overrunning engineering? It doesn’t matter what’s happening, the dashboard can relay the reason and tell the user how many minutes late that may make them.

This is a simple facility but one that is especially useful in the pandemic. TOCs have altered timetables to cope with reduced passenger numbers and face the additional burden of staff illness affecting the running of individual services, often at short notice. Armed with the dashboard, passengers can see instantly what that means for them and how it may affect onward connections.

Operators are well aware that complaints over delays are their biggest challenge from a PR point of view. The answer is tackling this at the source. People aren’t necessarily concerned with the delays per se, but more the ‘not knowing’. As the little flying plane icon proves, when it comes to journeys, travellers just to

want to know what's in store. That is basic human nature and is particularly important when so much in our lives currently is uncertain.

But the dashboard is more than a live timetable. The entire system is a vast repository for the helpful information that passengers need. Say I'm on the 1.20pm service from Euston to Manchester Piccadilly en route to Macclesfield. The system's map will show all the stops on the route. Click any of these and users can access every bit of station information – where is the coffee shop or disabled toilets? Where is the taxi rank? Click again and find live real-time bus service information.

Clearly, having access to this sort of data makes life easier for passengers, which in turn improves satisfaction scores and is a huge positive when it comes to DDA compliance. New functionality means the dashboard also allows the ordering of in-seat catering, which again reduces physical interaction between passengers and staff to minimise COVID-19 infection.

But imagine taking all this a step further. The dashboard allows two-way communication between traveller and TOC, meaning gripes and issues can be sorted before they find their way on to social media.

A passenger may want to report a broken toilet, for example. That's great, and the operator can respond by saying thanks and responding with the carriage location of the nearest alternative one. More importantly, TOCs can get ahead of negative feedback over more serious delays by using the system to send users treats such as coffee vouchers by way of compensation. Air conditioning not working? 'Ping'... here's a free ice cream redeemable at WH Smith when you reach your destination.

The logical conclusion for such a relationship could even be sending travellers links to delay repay forms. Since operators would be able to verify claims as genuine, refunds could ultimately even be provided before the customer gets off the train. That's the sort of seriously good service that will bring passengers back to the network."

*Edmund Caldecott, Founder and CEO at Whoosh. Visit [www.whooshmedia.co.uk](http://www.whooshmedia.co.uk).*