

Case Study | GNER Online Booking Engine

Flow helped GNER (now National Express East Coast) to create a ground-breaking online booking engine which has driven a dramatic increase in sales conversion and customer satisfaction as well as set a new standard for the UK rail industry.

The Brief

Design an online booking tool to increase and shift ticket sales online while building greater customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In the summer of 2006 GNER engaged Flow Interactive, Splendid (our favourite design agency) and Atos Origin (for the technical build) to create a new and innovative booking engine to replace the white-label Trainline site they and most other UK rail franchisees were using at the time.

The booking engine redesign was a major initiative in GNER's overall strategy to increase online sales and build loyalty by allowing customers navigate the complexity of UK rail services and fares in an easy and enjoyable way.

The new booking engine needed to:

- Provide a superior search, save and buy experience.
- Migrate sales from costly staff-serviced channels to the online channel.
- Support and build a positive brand experience
- Elegantly handle the complex relationship between fares, services and availability underpinning UK rail ticket sales.

What We Did

Design and evaluate a new online booking engine for GNER ready for launch by November 2007.

The project began with a research phase, exploring both business and user needs to ensure any solution would focus on delivering a great customer experience whilst also considering GNER's technological and operational ambitions and constraints.

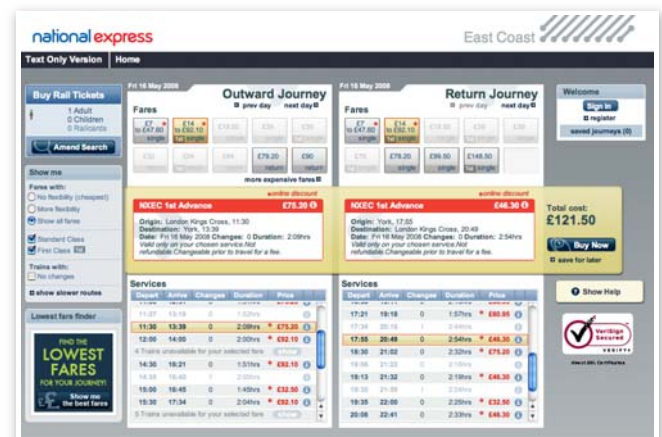
Informed by this research, personas and scenarios were created enabling the design team to define to a number of concepts that could satisfy established design goals in different ways.

Early testing revealed which concepts were favoured by users and these were refined through a series of rapid design/evaluation iterations resulting in a high fidelity prototype demonstrating functional, structural and visual design guidelines ready for development.

The Results

A first-of-its-kind, rich internet application for finding and booking train tickets in the United Kingdom which has dramatically increased conversion and customer satisfaction.

The booking engine was launched in November 2007 in conjunction with the redesign and launch of the website



National Express East Coast Booking Engine

which Flow and Splendid were also responsible for. Since launch the site's customer support team has had a field day with positive feedback.

People have enjoyed the intuitive interface which allows them to juggle price and time options while providing instant feedback to help them find the ideal ticket to meet their needs. The Lowest Fare Finder, offering the ability to shortcut directly to the cheapest options for travelling between any two locations on the UK rail network, regardless of franchise, has also proved particularly popular.

Ultimately the result is a booking engine and website (grounded in research with real users and developed with customer and stakeholder involvement throughout) which reflects the diverse needs of customers and makes the ticket finding and purchase process intuitive, simple and pleasurable.

Of course the proof is in the numbers. In the first 6 months since the launch of the new website:

- Overall revenue is up 30%,
- Conversion is over 12% (up from 8% the year before)
- Customer feedback is overwhelmingly positive about the ease of use and aesthetic appeal of the new site

The new website and booking engine have recently won the Rail Business Awards IT Excellence of the Year Award 2008.

"The Train Line is a horrid site to use...NEXC's is clean and intuitive"

"In future, I'll be buying all of my advance tickets online from NEXC, as their website is much more intuitive than the others. Good work!"



About Flow Interactive

Flow Interactive is a leading User-Centred Design Consultancy based in Clerkenwell, London. Founded in 1997, Flow specialises in research-based strategy and design for interactive products and services across a range of channels and platforms including Websites, PC and Web-based Software, Mobile Devices & iTV.

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