Case Study
Transport for London

Get ahead of the games

Summary

Keeping London moving was always going to be one of the biggest challenges of hosting the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and one of Britain’s largest ever peace time logistical exercises.

Even on a normal day, 3.5 million journeys are made on the London Underground and 5.5 million journeys are made by bus. During one of the busiest days of the Games on the 7th August, London Underground carried more than 4.5 million passengers.

On the roads, motorists followed TfL’s advice to avoid driving in central London with traffic down 40% compared with normal levels.

“In total we carried over 60 million passengers on the Tube, 30% more than usual and more than at any time in its 149 year history,” said Transport for London (TfL) Commissioner Peter Hendy.

“The number of people using the Docklands Light Railway rose by over 100% compared to last year while London Overground carried nearly six million passengers – both beating all previous records,” he added. It’s no surprise that Mr. Hendy describes it as “Britain’s largest-ever peacetime logistical exercise.”

The challenge

TfL and its partners including LOC O G and the Greater London Authority knew that if the Games were to be a success they needed a ‘rush hour transformation’ with Londoners avoiding the busiest routes, choosing different modes of transport and travelling outside peak times. They needed to persuade people to adjust their normal behaviour and plan their journeys ahead of time if the Games were to avoid the problems that beset the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta when athletes and spectators missed crucial events due to traffic chaos.

The Games has been described as Britain’s largest ever peace time logistical exercise.
How we helped

As TfL Online's lead digital partner for digital media design and build capabilities, BAE Systems was commissioned to define and deliver the Get Ahead of the Games website.

“We knew this was going to be a complex task to translate the iconic campaign into actionable online services, and that we had to work with trusted partners who would get it right first time – there were no second chances on this project.”

“We also knew this would require an extraordinary user experience and cutting edge online solutions and tools to enable customers to quickly understand the potential impact on them if they did not approach their Games-time travel in a different way.” says Phil Young, Head of Online, Transport for London.

The aim was to raise awareness as early as January 2012 that the transport network would be busier than normal during the Games. The website needed to provide specific Olympic and Paralympic travel advice to help people make decisions before getting on a bus, tube, train or driving their car; to encourage them to change their travel behaviour; and to keep the transport system moving.

The site needed to explain the transport challenges during the Games not only to Londoners but also to visitors who might have no knowledge of London’s transport system. It had to present complex information in a simple way and visualise the ‘hotspots’ that people should avoid. And it also needed to present information on travel in other parts of the UK affected by Olympic and Paralympic events.

All of this information needed to be delivered across the web to a range of channels such as platforms and channels including laptops, tablets and smart phones.

The Get Ahead of the Games site also had to be integrated with social media so that TfL could use Facebook and Twitter for the latest travel updates and upload videos on YouTube showing the route of events such as the torch relay which had an impact on local travel.

We worked with the TfL Online team and stakeholders from Surface Transport, which is responsible for all of London’s above-ground transport. We also worked with a number of agencies including We are Experience with whom we collaborated on the development of the user experience and information architecture of the site. We were also responsible for the delivery, coding and implementation of the site and worked very closely with M&C Saatchi adding real value to the project by translating their marketing campaign into web content, tools and functionality.

The website needed to take highly complex data based on travel patterns, predictions of travel during the Games and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) collected by TfL and visualise it in a very clear and simple form for the general public. TfL wanted people to understand the huge travel challenges that the Games would present.
The results

The site was up and running in January 2012 and had been visited more than 7.5 million times by September. Throughout the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games we provided support for the site as part of our ongoing role as lead supplier on TfL’s Digital Services Framework.

The site proved very popular with commuters and with businesses as they planned their travel before and during the Games, receiving 4.7 million visits and over 16 million pages views. It was also an essential tool for people visiting London for the first time.

The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, says that Get Ahead of the Games was his favourite website and London paper, the Evening Standard, says: “I was seduced by how clever it is: move the slider from day to day and different tube stations light up brightly – orange for busier than usual and red for exceptionally busy.”