

## Case study

# National Rail Enquiries boosts income with new web developments



## HP Optimost tests the online services used by millions

### Industry

Travel and transportation

### Objective

Test website improvements before they go live

### Approach

Investigated the market for suitable testing solutions

### IT matters

- Performs complex queries to provide a single, consistent view of visits, conversions and customer engagement across all channels
- Blends clickstream data with human information and application data to deliver actionable insights

### Business matters

- Increased desktop sales conversions by over 13 percent and mobile conversions by 25 percent, growing revenues by 17 percent and 16 percent respectively
- Accelerated time to market of new services by cutting development time by 400 percent
- Grew customer registrations by two percent on a base of two million registered customers and followers, enabling NRE to meet one of its principle KPIs



**“Our websites are always changing so we always need to be testing new developments to see if they are viable. It’s an ongoing process because you can never rest with optimization and HP Optimost is absolutely central to this.”**

– Keith Stephens, web development manager, National Rail Enquiries



### Constantly changing websites

National Rail Enquiries is the UK’s definitive source of information for all passenger rail services and handles 500 million customer contacts per year. Its websites are constantly being improved and new developments are tested with HP Optimost before they go live for many millions of users.

**Train times & tickets** Edit journey / add return Passengers & railcards Print Save

**London Paddington [PAD] to York [YRK]**

1<sup>st</sup> First class From £78.00 Buy cheapest for £41.50

Outward Wed 22 Aug Set up journey alerts Other cheap fares

**Earlier trains** Single from £41.50

Dep.	From	To	Arr.	Dur.	Chg.	Status	Based on 1 adult	
10:53	London Paddington [PAD]	York [YRK] Platform 9	13:21	2h 28m	1	<a href="#">Details</a>	✓	£53.00 <small>Off-Peak More fares</small>
11:00	London Paddington [PAD]	York [YRK] Platform 9	13:32	2h 32m	1	<a href="#">Details</a>	✓	£50.00 <small>Advance More fares</small>
11:05	London Paddington [PAD]	York [YRK] Platform 11	13:40	2h 35m	2	<a href="#">Details</a>	✓	£50.00 <small>Advance More fares</small>
11:30	London Paddington [PAD]	York [YRK] Platform 9	13:53	2h 23m	1	<a href="#">Details</a>	✓	£50.00 <small>Advance More fares</small>
12:00	London Paddington [PAD]	York [YRK] Platform 11	14:32	2h 32m	1	<a href="#">Details</a>	✓	<b>CHEAPEST FARE</b> £41.50 <small>Advance More fares</small>

## Challenge

### Web optimization

Recognized as the definitive source of impartial customer information on UK rail service, National Rail Enquiries (NRE) is part of the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) which represents the UK’s 23 train operators. Through its principal desktop website and a growing number of mobile apps it provides information on train times, fares, reservations and service disruptions along with live departure boards, details of every UK station, and commercial opportunities such as discount and promotional rail cards. Once visitors make their buying decision, they are automatically routed to the appropriate train company site to buy the tickets.

Since its inception, it has passed over £1 billion worth of potential sales on the train companies; an average of 2.9 million journey planning enquiries are handled every weekday and its smart phone apps have been downloaded over nine million times.

NRE is not content to rest on its success, and constantly strives to improve its services, as web development manager Keith Stephens explains: “We are the single source of truth for most rail information and our two Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are conversions and registrations. We work to increase the monetary value of all the conversions that we pass across to the train companies and we also aim to get more users to sign up and create accounts on the website so they can get more value out of the service.

“We are ambitiously migrating away from the contact center towards self-service channels and that’s happening on a massive scale. We’re seeing a big rise in the traffic to our digital channels and the website is the single most popular option.”

## Solution

### Live testing

NRE needed a tool that would cut through the complexity of testing new ideas on large numbers of people. It looked at different solutions and was attracted by the hands-on managed service approach and flexible licensing of HP Optimost.

HP Optimost uses advanced pattern-matching, testing and optimization capabilities to give businesses rigorous clickstream and segmentation analytics that help maximize online traffic and revenue. It also provides users with access to granular clickstream data, enabling them to aggregate, combine and analyze the information any way they choose. They can perform queries on complete datasets and get new insights on their customers and on how they react to changes in real time. Using Optimost as a managed service also gives NRE the benefit of HP specialist knowledge in this area.

The HP solution has now been used for approximately 30 different tests on NRE website modifications.

Outward Sun 11 Oct							Other cheap fares
Earlier trains							Single from <b>£29.50</b>
Dep.	From	To	Arr.	Dur.	Chg.	Status	Based on 1 adult
21:16	Ashford International [AFK] Platform 5	London St Pancras International [STP] Platform 13	21:54	38m	0	<a href="#">Details</a> <span>✓ on time</span>	<b>CHEAPEST FARE</b> <b>£29.50</b> <a href="#">Buy Now</a> Off-Peak Other tickets <span>▼</span> Other services you can travel on
21:43	Ashford International [AFK] Platform 5	London St Pancras International [STP]	22:22	39m	0	<a href="#">Details</a> <span>✓ on time</span>	<b>£29.50</b> <a href="#">Buy Now</a> Off-Peak Other tickets <span>▼</span> Other services you can travel on
22:16	Ashford International [AFK]	London St Pancras International [STP]	22:54	38m	0	<a href="#">Details</a> <span>✓ on time</span>	<b>£29.50</b> <a href="#">Buy Now</a> Off-Peak Other tickets <span>▼</span> Other services you can travel on

“We work together with our team from HP Optimost to develop a hypothesis. We then agree the scope of the tests. The HP managed service team then builds the experiment,” explains Stephens.

“We release it to a random cohort of live users and every time they visit the website, they see the same variation. The tests run for about three weeks and we run up to three different rounds of tests at that stage. Initially a test can have five or six different variants of, say, copy changes or moving around elements on the page and as we progress through the weeks more and more users are exposed to that test. It’s usually over 100,000 users per variant. As we narrow it down, eventually we will be comparing what we think is going to be the final winner against no change at all and that final winner has been validated against 200,000 to 300,000 users. Even though testing is done on the live website we can hide it from the majority of customers until we’re ready release it.

“The system calculates a confidence rating for each variant. As user traffic for each test variant builds up, we get more confident with the results. If it’s about 99 percent we know for sure that when we roll that change out to all users, it undoubtedly has the effect that it should have.”

## Benefits

### Increased income

Two examples indicate the tangible benefits of NRE testing carried out with HP Optimost. HP specialists working with Optimost advised shortening of the e-commerce funnel down to a three-step process for visitors. Suggested changes also included replacing one single “Buy Now” radio button with individual “Buy Now” buttons against every fare in the journey planner.

After thorough testing with HP Optimost the changes brought a 13.5 percent uplift in sales conversions rates on the desktop website, increasing revenue by over 7 percent, and an impressive 25 percent conversion uplift on the mobile website, resulting in 16 percent revenue growth. These have significantly helped with the organization’s KPI targets, and the additional income generated has already paid for many years of the HP Optimost managed service contract.

“The main benefit of HP Optimost functionality is the live testing,” says Stephens. “Because we outsource our native development of the digital channels there can be some very long implementation times but using Optimost reduced our developments times by an average of four months - a 400 percent saving.”

## Customer solution at a glance

### Software

- HP Optimost

### HP services

- HP Managed Services

A further project to optimize registration forms also brought a two percent uplift in registrations. NRE currently has two million registered customers and followers and according to ongoing surveys, customer satisfaction levels are high. In 2014, 72,000 customer survey forms were completed.

“Optimost reduced our development times by an average of four months – a 400 percent saving.”

– Keith Stephens, web development manager, National Rail Enquiries

In addition to pure commercial benefits, the managed service delivery of HP Optimost has brought additional benefits as Stephens explains: “We’re quite a small team here and are very resource light in that area. We are involved in many other tasks so it’s great to be able to hand an operation like this over to a managed service. We get value out of the experience that the guys at HP have got and I can focus on many other things that I am involved in without becoming involved in the technicalities of the tests.”

NRE aims to put its service onto every major technology platform and its future use of HP Optimost will support this. There are plans to use a new app optimization solution and to test a portfolio of eight websites that feature various railcards and a Days Out site which co-promotes rail journeys and tourist destinations.

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