

PatenTicket: Peer-to-Peer Marketing of Public Transport to Older People in Cologne, Germany



In 2008, 117 older public transport season ticket holders in Cologne received a free 3-month ticket to give to a friend or relative who was a non-frequent PT user. The season ticket holders received training from the PT operator and then for 3 months showed their chosen peer the benefits of public transport and supported them with information and advice as they travelled together, developing new transportation habits.

Background & Objectives

The PatenTicket concept evolved from a German research project which dealt with leisure time mobility of older people in rural, urban and suburban regions in Germany. The results showed that there is a need to promote public transport among older people, but also to familiarise them with it.

The aim of the PatenTicket project is to support older people to be active, independent and permanent clients of public transport. Since it is difficult to reach this target group by standard marketing campaigns, PatenTicket uses a peer-to-peer approach. Individual pairs travel together, enjoying each other's company as they learn about public transport, in order to support the development new transport habits.

The PatenTicket approach involves two target groups. The first is the "godparents," who are public transport pass holders aged 60+. The second target group, the "godchildren," includes those aged 60+ who do not possess a season ticket. While the project design saw no upper age limit, the idea was to reach younger and more active senior citizens.

Implementation

In order to change transportation habits, new routines need to be developed, but this can be a challenge when the target group is senior citizens. A key area for achieving behavioural change was communication. Specific consideration was given to the channels of communication employed, the tone of communication, materials provided, the use of designated contact people, and the language used. Setting up the programme:

The campaign was announced in smaller local newspapers popular among older people. The 'godparents' were contacted via standard mail and telephone. An easy-to-read leaflet with simple and clear language was created to avoid information overload. Dedicated contact people were assigned to the project. These people were present at information sessions, their photos appeared on the information leaflet, and participants were given their phone numbers and e-mail addresses. This was invaluable in establishing trust and confidence. Information sessions for potential 'godparents' also helped to establish trust and demonstrate the legitimacy of the project. Terms such as "older people" and "senior citizens" were avoided in all communication. The project team agreed at the beginning that the trial would automatically end after three months and that the 'godchildren' would not be contacted and encouraged to buy a season ticket., to avoid any suspicion that people may have of being taken advantage of.

The project cost and evaluation was funded by the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development and supported by the TUV Rheinland Consulting GmbH. Project management and evaluations were provided by urbane konzepte GmbH and the Technical University of Dortmund. The funding covered also the cost of 117 three-month 'Aktiv60Tickets' for the project. The main cost for the Cologne Transport Company was the coordination and provision of dedicated contact people whom the participants could turn to throughout the project.

'Godparents' were recruited from a random sample of approximately 800 Aktiv60Ticket holderst. 117

participated. The 'godparents', in turn, recruited their 'godchildren' personally.

Programme steps:

1. develop the general approach, information material and a cover letter (3-4 months)
2. contact, select and train godparents (3-4 months)
3. run the trial (3 months: spring and early summer are most suitable)
4. collect feedback and carry out evaluation (3 months)

Conclusions

Standardised questionnaires for all and qualitative telephone interviews carried out with part of the the 'godchildren' and the godparents at the end of the 3 months indicated that they were motivated to participate for the following reasons:

- to test out PT travel for free
- to see if a year or month ticket was worth it
- to see how mobile one could be without a car
- to enjoy the convenience of a "ticket in the pocket"
- to enjoy the pleasure of travelling with a friend
- to get to know the city better.

30% of 'godchildren' purchased an Aktiv60Ticket after their 3-month experience. It is also interesting to note that 74% of 'godparents' and 72% of 'godchildren' were female.

Success factors for the PatenTicket include:

- An attractive offer: The Aktiv60Ticket was seen as attractive by its existing holders. Older people highlighted the convenience rather than economic savings. For example, they were proud that the conditions of the ticket allowed them to take extra people on their ticket for free.
- Peer-to-peer approach: Trust is built in by friends mentoring friends. Older passengers know what their peers need and can advise them best.
- The social aspect: Participants were inspired by the project to plan leisure activities together; some even set up regular get-togethers with other PatenTicket pairs.
- Trial period: the three-month trial period gave participants time to familiarise themselves with public transport before committing to it.
- Appropriate communication: Communication was low-tech (letters and phone calls) and personal (face-to-face meetings and a dedicated contact person).
- Off-peak travellers: From the perspective of the provider, older people are an ideal target group. They often travel off-peak, contributing to more balanced use of vehicle capacity.

The concept behind the PatenTicket was developed independent of any specific location and so should be applicable in other contexts with reasonable public transport networks. Cologne's public transport operator, KVB AG, agreed to pilot the project in 2008. Based on its success, a follow-up project has been set for spring 2011 together with the KVB AG and the RVK GmbH, focusing on seniors living in the outskirts of Cologne and suburbs with relatively good public transport access

In cooperation with:

