

**Best practice, good luck  
or sheer fluke?**

***You decide***

# What I am going to talk about

- 1 A bit about the area we serve
- 2 Starting with a clean canvas
- 3 Identifying what people want
- 4 How we set out to meet the demand and especially latent demand
- 5 Partnership with local authorities
- 6 Results
- 7 Lessons we have learned

# North & West Norfolk

- An area on the way to nowhere
- Low population density
- Ageing population – young people leave
- Second (third) home territory
- Largest town 40k population
- Buoyant economy, but....
- Smaller market towns experiencing retail decline
- Not a place to start running buses?

# Starting with a clean canvas

- Company was set up in 1996
- Prior to that one large plc operator (First) and lots of very small operators
- First provided some regular services on small number of key corridors
- Rest of the area served by smaller operators typically one or two days a week
- Meant we had plenty of niche opportunities

# Identifying what people want

- The car was (and remains) the dominant form of transport
- We couldn't afford objective market research
- We listened to what people said
- We watched to see where car trips sufficient to consider new all-week bus services

# Meeting demand & latent demand

- New bus services designed to be as direct as possible to match car trips
- We set fares to compare with marginal cost of motoring (fuel, wear+tear, parking)
- We target marketing to particular audience
- We monitor performance closely
- We engage closely with the community

# Partnership with local authorities

- Much wider than just liaison about bus services
- We work on basis that if the local economy is successful then so we shall be
- We share risk of service development with transport authority; they accept that we know the market better than they do
- We don't like free travel reimbursement arrangements but accept that they are what they are

# Results

- We now provide network of services running on 800 miles of roads
- Most of the routes we provide didn't exist in similar form by any operator
- We started with 3 buses, now have 61, of which 85% fully accessible
- We run 3m kms of service a year
- We carry 2.9 m passengers a year
- We are profitable and re-invest it all

# Results

- We monitor passenger numbers, get that and cost control right and profits will follow
- Train front line staff – they are key
- Low average fares for distances travelled
- Expanding our range of discounted travel tickets
- Use of wide range of media for advertising
- Passenger growth about 12.5% pa equally between free travellers and fare payers

# Lessons we have learned

- Rural buses can be highly successful
- Industry needs more, better management
- Close working relationships with local authorities (not just transport authorities)
- Train the staff
- Design and price bus services to be attractive alternative to motoring
- Promote services heavily