

## Who we are

We're proud to have been transporting customers in and around Reading for over 120 years. Yes, there's a lot of history but we're committed to providing a quality bus service with a strong focus on customer service and innovation. Along with our owners, Reading Borough Council, we're successfully reducing car dependency for access to the area, both for visitors and residents.

It is this approach which has made us a success story. Our fleet of 159 buses is very environmentally-friendly and includes 1 battery electric and 60 gas buses, and all of our diesel fleet meets or has been upgraded to meet Euro VI standards, so we're dramatically improving the air quality for all Reading's people too.

## A 'gem' of a communication strategy throughout a challenging time.

Great colleague communications have always been at the heart of the business and ensuring people feel engaged and involved is absolutely essential in creating an inclusive environment, we wanted to make sure that this continued even during multiple lockdown and trying times.

2020 wasn't exactly a 'gem' of a year. We couldn't let this difficult year pass without thanking and recognising the hard work and dedication of our wonderful employees. Celebrating employees during hard times could have been put to one side... not for Reading Buses. Due to coronavirus we couldn't hold our annual Star of the Year awards, so the GEM (Going the Extra Mile) 2020 awards scheme was specially introduced to recognise employees who have made a difference during a challenging 2020.

A complete change to the communications strategy, we started with nominations in September, not knowing if it could be a physical event. When we knew that couldn't happen, we moved online! Nominations were all done online, with communications across our new Facebook Employee Forum and Reading Buses social media.

From engineers to drivers and those in behind-the-scenes roles, nominations covered every aspect of the business. Among the winners were two employees who set up an employee foodbank to help colleagues struggling with financial hardship, engineers who kept buses safe, plus drivers caring for lost children.

The communications showed that our employees have all given their very best and have certainly gone the extra mile for our customers and equally importantly for each other as well. Our very own frontline heroes showed that our town's award-winning bus company is still doing its very best to get people where they need to be with a bit of extra sparkle, even in a pandemic.

Here's the gem awards communications in numbers, and some tips and ideas on how you can recognise employees in a more virtual environment.

- 134 nominations from customers and employees
- 12 categories, 15 winners
- Over 1,600 likes, almost 450 comments and 85 shares - our most engaging online communications campaign.
- Numerous press releases to encourage nominations, celebrate the shortlist, a teaser of the winners and the full winners list.
- 4-month campaign with nominations online during lockdown in November/December and then individually announcing the winners across the January/February lockdown.
- Picking the right times and the right media, we reminded customers we're a company who cares. As well as helping employee morale, we helped customers remember us while they are not using the bus and consider us again when the time is right.
- Communications cost - £0. All produced in-house – artwork, printing, production, so time was only campaign cost.
- Focussing on our amazing people, we reinvented our annual awards to fit around Covid restrictions - giving our most successful scheme yet!
- We'll think about doing it differently next time to learn from what worked well when we were forced to think differently.

And the bit you can't put a number on: The communications recognised Team Reading Buses at its best. With people at our heart – employees and customers – the gem awards was successful not only in numbers but generated a 'feel good' campaign which told a heart-warming story to customers and stakeholders, while helping employee morale at a particularly tough time.

**Now that's a gem of a communications campaign!**