



West Quay Cars, Southampton benefit from unique Sherlock Taxi features to manage busy cruise ship days.

Key Facts



West Quay Cars boasts a fleet of over 150 cars servicing Southampton



The contract supplier of private hire services for cruise ship customers



Completing up to 2500 jobs per day

The background

West Quay Cars (WQC) have been servicing Southampton city for nearly 20 years. The company's mission is to provide a value for money, high quality service to people across Southampton from students and cruise ship holidaymakers to large corporate accounts. The business averages 50,000 bookings per month with business peaking during the summer holidays due to the cruise ship contract.

Challenge

Lee and Caroline, the proprietors of WQC, had a number of reasons why they wanted to find a new dispatch provider. They were looking for a technology partner who would provide regular software updates and be able to quickly respond to their specific development requests.

Their passenger app was not fully integrated with their wider system which caused inaccurate response times and ETAs to be given to customers. The biggest concern for

WQC related to job allocation. This problem was twofold; the allocation settings had limitations which made it difficult to prioritise account work appropriately and they were also not dynamic enough to take real-time traffic conditions into account. Traffic conditions are particularly important to WQC as there is an influx of vehicles in Southampton on cruise ship days. This meant that controllers had to manually allocate jobs early to make sure that they could all be covered.

More about the cruise ship days

One of the most interesting aspects of WQC's business is their cruise ship contract. The business holds the contract for supplying private hire vehicles to cruise ship customers, this work must always be fulfilled and on some days it can be up to five ships and almost double the amount of trips that the business typically does in one day. This coupled with the local football stadium, O2 concert venue and Southampton nightlife means that WQC is extremely busy during peak times.

Solution

WQC chose Sherlock Taxi as their new provider as they were confident in the team's ability to help solve these issues. Having met the team at the PHTM exhibition, the owners were impressed with Sherlock Taxi staff's knowledge and experience of the taxi industry and their commitment to continuously evolving the product with new features to keep it at the forefront of technology.

Some of WQC's problems were very easy to address – Sherlock Taxi releases software updates to customers as part of the licence fee and bespoke development is also available. The passenger app is built into Sherlock Taxi's core system which ensures that passengers receive real-time updates. As it isn't simply 'bolted on' to the main system, it also means that customers will receive the same ETA regardless of whether they have booked on the app, web portal or through the call centre.

Improving job allocation efficiency and accuracy was paramount. The business used to allocate work via 'plots'. We advise our customers to use Sherlock Taxi's allocation method called 'best driver' which decides the most suitable driver by evaluating the fleet as whole against your key criteria (e.g. prioritising a high-value customer). WQC are able to use plots and best driver depending on the demand for work. For example, the business can use plots during quiet periods and switch to best driver during peak times to maximise the amount of work which can be completed. As the system evaluates the entire fleet, this drives up efficiency across the board. We also developed an offer scheme to offer jobs to the closest available empty drivers if the system cannot find anyone suitable in the rank. Finally, we added functionality to look for a driver in 'passenger on board (POB)' status near the pick-up address using best driver radiuses as a last resort if there was still not a driver available.

All of these features, including plots, work automatically and in conjunction with each other – meaning the controller doesn't need to intervene.

Additional business-specific features were implemented to support the cruise ship work. These included the ability to define cruise ship terminals, a mandatory field for customers to provide a meeting point and a field to confirm the number of passengers and luggage to ensure an appropriate vehicle was booked.

Lee and Caroline were keen to understand as much as possible about the technology and the implications of the settings and making changes to their configurations. Over several weeks, we trained them and their senior staff to enable them to take real ownership over their new system, understanding the effect of different settings.

Outcome

With any new system, there is a period of adjustment. Drivers and office staff need to get used to using the new system and settings need tweaking to make sure the system is functioning at its optimum. Sherlock Taxi staff from the development team and UK office were onsite for several days to support WQC and take staff feedback on board. Changes were made including tweaks to plots and best driver logic to optimise the system for their specific business needs.

The business has seen many improvements since implementing Sherlock Taxi. The efficiency of job allocation has been greatly improved with auto allocation averaging at 80% 24 hours a day, seven days a week and as a result, drivers are completing more jobs in any given timeframe. They have also taken advantage of the web-booker and kiosk in partner hotels to dramatically increase automation as well.

On cruise ship days the business is incredibly busy. With Sherlock's circuit locks, temporary delays and booking restrictions by priority customer, they can now manage the influx of work much more effectively and ensure that the customers that must be given a car – e.g. the cruise ship passengers – are prioritised.

Lee Haynes, West Quay Cars Owner remarked,

“ *The back-end and admin functions in Sherlock are in our opinion, by far the best on the market. The reporting functions and statistical analysis available has not only allowed us to be more efficient, we can also target specific marketing opportunities. Making the switch to a new system was about finding a provider who is dynamic and progressive with a more sophisticated system and bespoke development if and when required.* ”