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Contactless for W Mids

By Mel Holley

National Express West Midlands (NEWM) is fitting every one of its 1,500 buses contactless technology.

It has signed a multi-million pound deal for ticket machines that can take bank cards, smartphones and smart watches, as well as cash and Swift smartcards.

The first ticket machines will be appearing on buses in Coventry at the end of this year, and will be rolled out across the whole West Midlands fleet over the following two years.

MD Peter Coates says: "We know our customers want the choice of using contactless when they travel.

"Only a month ago, we introduced it on the Midland Metro and already 7% of passengers buying a ticket on board are using contactless.

"So, as part of our pledge to the West Midlands Bus Alliance to get more people travelling by bus, we are investing in contactless because it makes journeys quicker and easier for passengers."

National Express West Midlands awarded the contract for driver consoles, on-board computers, ticket printers, validators and back-office systems to German company INIT Innovations in Transportation.



Coming together (l-r) Matthias Kuhn, COO of INIT; Jens Mullak, MD of Init; Dr Jurgen Greschner, CSO of INIT; Martin Hancock, Development Director, National Express; Paul Nash, National Express West Midlands driver



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At INIT we have brilliant developers, but rather than evolving five different interfaces it's far more intelligent for them to focus on just one, and make it work really well. This in turn frees them

up to concentrate more on innovation – for the benefit of ourselves at t, our customers, transport operators, and even the end-users, the passengers themselves.

THE KEY FUNCTION OF ITXPT IS TO ACT AS A TECHNICAL PLATFORM FOR TESTING & VALIDATING THE PLUG-AND-PLAY IT SYSTEMS DEVELOPED? WHY IS PLUG-AND-PLAY SO ESSENTIAL?

It's all about making time and cost savings by removing the need to configure new systems when adding them to a vehicle, i.e. along the same principle as slotting a memory stick into a computer to instantly access its content. Plug-and-play systems integrate public transport, and share information sent by all stakeholders involved in the bus journey.

At INIT, when we have a new customer, a new project, our first step is to check all the existing hardware, to examine the plugs and cabling on board to find out if we can use them as they are, what we will have to adjust, etc. And the hardware is never plug-and-play. In other words we have to develop, install, test, adjust, and so forth. This process takes a lot of time, effort, and, of course, costs money.

WHAT TRENDS ARE YOU SEEING IN ITS IN THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORLD AT LARGE?

In everyday life, outside of public transport, IT systems are becoming increasingly the norm. For

Layout changed



example, a decade ago, touch interfaces were very rare, or unusual, as were smartphones. Then came the iPhone, since when the touch interface has become a must-have. However in public transport, touch screens and smartphones, for example, are developing more for passenger-orientated applications, e.g. information, ticketing, etc. They serve to create points of contact with passengers, to align

the sector with their everyday habits as citizens of today's digital world.

Having said that, at the professional end of public transport, i.e. back offices, management and operations, the traditional way of doing things with a 'normal' desktop computer and keyboard still exist, simply because the interface is more practical, e.g. for filing a report on a traffic incident, and so forth.

However for our customers, modularity of on-board equipment is very important. What they want is easy integration of equipment from supplier A, supplier B, and supplier C.

HOW IS BUSINESS FOR INIT? HAS THE RECESSION MADE AN IMPACT?

Overall, I would say the economic downturn hasn't had a marked effect on the company because we are active across the globe, e.g. from Nottingham (U.K.) and Avignon (France) to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). There are always ups and downs in markets at any given time.

A new development for us in recent years has been the ticketing segment for public transport in North America. This is quite surprising because the systems used to be rudimentary. But for some reason they are now adopting

e- and mobile ticketing. So this market is really growing for us, as is Asia, where we are interested in developing business •