

Right on time

How SMS helped
Virgin Trains be there
for their customers

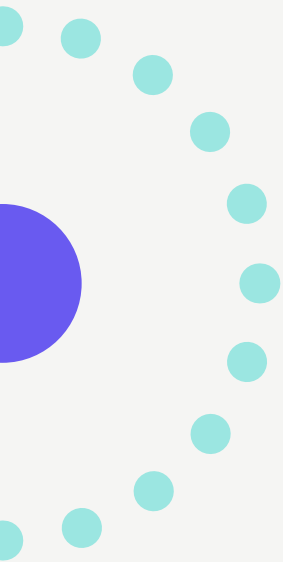


The rush of the wildebeest

Huddled on the banks of the Mara River, Africa's wildebeest are waiting. Suddenly, all at once, the whole herd is in motion. Ten thousand bodies swarm in an awesome surge of dust, hooves and horns. The beasts scramble and jostle and stumble and barge, hurling themselves forwards, churning the water into a white spray, each desperate to make it to safety and the opposite bank.

It's one of the most awesome sights in the natural world.

If you want to see people behaving like wildebeests, head to London's Euston Station on a Friday evening between 5pm and 7pm.



You won't see much wildlife, but the herds of commuters are wild enough. On the huge concourse, you'll see thousands of them waiting, necks craned, furiously scanning the departure board. Each time a platform is announced, another group surges forward in a flurry of handbags, briefcases, umbrellas, pushchairs and weekend bags.

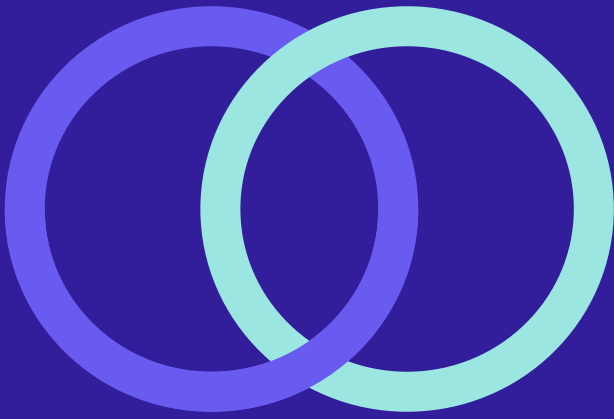
But beyond this busy scene, the really eagle-eyed station watcher will see a different story. Not everyone is staring at the departure screens. Not everyone is caught up in the rush and panic. A few select passengers look calm and collected. They've just come out of a nearby restaurant where they've been having a pre-journey drink or a relaxed meal before traveling. One brief glance at their phone, then they're strolling to their train's platform ahead of the crowds – and with just a hint of swagger in their step.

These are Virgin customers. And they've just received a text message telling them their platform number before everyone else finds out.

At OpenMarket we call this an Empathetic Interaction™.

@VirginTrains texting which platform my train was on was pretty sweet! You could tell who got the text and who didn't. :D
#walkedcasually

Today at 11:38AM



The Empathetic Interaction™

The Empathetic Interaction is all about seizing the countless invisible opportunities to help your customers or employees by delivering information, experiences and alerts that'll make their lives easier.

It's about using what you know about the individual and the situation they're in – then anticipating what'll make them happy. When their needs and yours can be met in a single moment, Empathetic Interactions become truly valuable.

OpenMarket's multi-channel mobile messaging platform, indigo, makes it easy for your people to create Empathetic Interactions without relying on IT's help.

Templated campaigns, best-practice insights, AI, and a direct connection to the world's best global messaging network help you deliver the right conversations, on the right channels, at the right time.

[Find out more](#)



Crowds, noise and busyness

Euston is one of the UK's busiest rail stations. Its yearly footfall is comparable to Heathrow (about 72 million) and the number of trains arriving there increases every year.

For the individual passenger, it can be a difficult experience. The size of the crowds can make people tense. The risk of bumping into passengers traveling on alternate trajectories is high. And the lines at busy ticket barriers and the fact that the furthest carriages are about a third of a mile from the concourse can make people worry they'll miss their train.

The key busy point is on the vast main concourse. The sheer volume of trains and passengers means it's extremely busy, and the passenger surges when platform numbers are displayed on departure boards make traveling awkward and uncomfortable.



Project Surge

For Virgin Trains, this experience wasn't good enough. The company had nearly 36million passengers a year across their services – and the conditions were causing frustrations for each and every one of them.

That's why they started Project Surge, to send simple, effective mobile messages to ease passenger flows at Euston. The project meant they could send the train platform and seat number to each passenger who'd booked online – a full 75 seconds before it appeared on the big departure boards. The online bookers got a stress-free head start – and the rest of the passengers enjoyed lower congestion levels.

20 minutes before departure the passenger gets a text message to reassure them they haven't been forgotten.

75 seconds before it's announced to everyone else, the passenger gets an Early Bird Message, letting them know their platform number and reminding them where they're sitting.

Based on need and status, these staggered notifications are sent to people with special needs, elderly travelers, people traveling with children and loyalty members. This splits one big crowd surge into smaller groups, taking the pressure off the ticket control process and improving the customer experience all round.

‘Well that’s clever!’

The best innovations are the ones that make you slap your forehead and say, ‘Why didn’t we think of that?’ And the most innovative companies are the ones setting the benchmark for customer experience.

Very few people consciously think, ‘Wow! I can use my phone as a ticket to check-in for my flight!’ It’s just become standard. It’s when an airline doesn’t offer smartphone ticketing and you’re fumbling around in your bag looking for printed tickets that you really notice.

So it was with Virgin Trains Early Bird Message system. Customers loved it. 25% of passengers bought train tickets direct from Virgin, and improving their experience paid dividends: digital ticket sales increased and Virgin Trains had a 28% Net Promoter Score increase six months after the program started.

It was a huge customer experience improvement – which only timely SMS messages could deliver. No other channel could be there in that exact moment.

Virgin led its industry in an age when customer experience was rapidly becoming the biggest differentiator. When you can do that with something as simple as a text message – personal and powerful to the customer, automated and massively scalable to you... well, that's even better.

Well that's clever @VirginTrains!
There's a million people at
#Euston but it doesn't matter
– I get a text from you with my
platform no!

Today at 11:38AM

@VirginTrains I'm loving the
platform no. text alert! Got ahead
of the crowd for a VERY busy
train. Fab start to the journey
#greatservice

Today at 11:38AM

Multi-channel messaging

Discover how the indigo multi-channel messaging platform works.



[Download the eBook](#)

We're OpenMarket

We help the biggest brands in the world use mobile messaging to connect with people in the moments that count. When they need to be helpful and responsive in real time. When customer experience isn't just a buzzword, it's an obsession. We'd love to do the same for you.

