Case Study

City Information Centre Mobile Working

City Information Centre Street Guides
The City Information Centre’s (CIC) outreach activities aligns with VisitEngland’s Strategic Framework Objective 4, to facilitate greater engagement between the visitor and the experience. It also contributes to VisitEngland’s Destination Management Action Plan by helping to ensure the availability of world class, tailored information at every stage of the visitor journey and supporting 5% growth, year-on-year in the England tourism market by 2020.

In the run up to the 2012 Games, the City Information Centre became increasingly aware of the requirement to deliver visitor information to people where and when they needed it, rather than expecting them to search out the Centre. In 2012, this was on-street at the major events the City was hosting.

A previous local volunteer scheme which provided information helpers on-street (the SquareMilers) did not offer a feasible solution at the time, as the City has a low resident population (9k) and a large Monday to Friday working one (380k). Potential volunteers from various communities which had previously helped deliver the on-street service instead chose to work at the Olympic Park or in the boroughs where they lived, diminishing an already small pool from which to recruit.

The City of London Corporation (CoL) has in its staff. The CIC - which is provided by CoL - has only a small staff, but the wider organisation employs some 3,000+ across its departments and functions (including the City of London Police). The CIC were quick to realise this and:

- Set up a “Street Guides” scheme using CoL staff to deliver on-street information at events; the staff were given Time off in Lieu (ToiL) in exchange for their contribution
- Offered to provide training for the Greater London Authority’s (GLA) London Ambassadors (in 2012, 2013 and 2014) and so strengthened its reputation for expertise in the field of London visitor information
- Harnessed the legacy of its 2012 work by:
  - Continuing to provide the on-street guide scheme in the same way for major events post 2012
  - Buying one of the GLA’s 2012 visitor information electric vans, rebranding it and rolling this out at events inside and outside of the City
  - Developing a plan to deliver a concierge service at City business events providing visitor information services for delegates
**Approach**

The resources required to achieve the solutions were provided by the City of London Corporation. This was predominantly staff time with some very little costs incurred for hospitality. The purchase of the van was the only significant expenditure and this was met from the profits the CIC generated from sales of tickets and souvenirs in what turned out to be an exceptional year in terms of footfall and revenue for the Centre.

**Recruiting and training Street Guides**

- A series of “insight lunches” were arranged for staff from across the organisation
- A fun presentation and the hook of getting out from behind a desk and being part of something big were promoted at the lunches and questions were answered by the CIC, visitor development, HR, security and contingency planning and partners
- 95 staff were recruited, each requiring sign-off from their line managers to be able to benefit from the ToiL
- A training programme was devised working with the GLA (for Olympic product knowledge), the City Police (emergency and security planning) and other departments as appropriate; the CIC (having attended the GLA’s Olympic product training), provided the Games-time knowledge and London product knowledge training
- Street Guides were deployed at all major events (marathons, Athletes Parades etc.)
- Following the Games, the scheme was formally recognised by CoL corporate “employee volunteering scheme” and Guides continue to be recruited, trained and deployed using the two days’ ToiL allowance made available by the scheme; these Guides are deployed at major City events, such as the Lord Mayor’s Show and, in 2014, the Tour de France

**The mobile van**

- Following the Games, the GLA needed to divest its small fleet of electric vans that had been used by Ambassadors across London to give out visitor information
- At a favourable rate the CIC purchased a van, rebranded it and now deploys it at City events as well as at other activities outside of the City if invited to do so
- The van can carry significant supplies of leaflets and so it not only complements any Street Guide presence, but also provides a handy stocking station for Guides; the van is usually staffed by the CIC team
- The van has been used by a number of external organisations (including the GLA) to provide a visitor information presence as part of a scheme or activity pertinent to that organisation – that it now carries City branding helps to promote the destination

**The CIC as a trainer of London Ambassadors**

- With its expert knowledge in London and national product, the CIC have been used by the GLA to train their Ambassadors for the last three summers in a row, 2012-2014
- The advantages of this are significant – it is reputationally beneficial for the CIC and helps to position it as the leader in the field of visitor information in London
- The training allows the story of the City to be told through Ambassadors operating in other parts of London, helping to drive footfall
- The training is delivered free of charge to the GLA in the CIC’s role as provider of valued services to London and the nation

**Concierge service**

- Going forward, the CIC is developing plans to provide a visitor information concierge service at conferences and events
- The service will be run at profit and offered to organisations/ venues in the City in the first phase of its inception

**Partners**

No financing partners were needed for this project; however CIC did work with (and continues to do so) a number of bodies to deliver training and exposure for services and activities. They include:

- City of London Corporation departments and teams including HR, security and contingency planning, employee volunteering and visitor development
- City of London Police (training)
- Greater London Authority (training of Ambassadors, reuse of van and provider of opportunities such as Ride London, at which CIC deploys Guides)
- London Borough Tower Hamlets (contra deal regarding promotion of their “Market Mile” in exchange for a presence in their markets at weekends at which CIC can direct visitors to the City)
- London and Partners (promotion of schemes)
Results

The positive results

• Significant exposure for City product through the van and Guides, driving economic benefits for stakeholders
• Significant exposure for the City Information Centre as a provider of visitor services within the industry and London government, enhancing its position and value
• An enhanced visitor experience and a better quality of life for those attending events

95
Street Guides recruited initially – pool fluctuates between 50 and 70 on an on-going basis

150-200
people interacting with each Guide at major events

6,000
if 20 to 30 Guides are deployed (as for the Lord Mayor’s Show) this can mean an audience of up to 6,000 extra visitors are engaged

• Capacity is significantly lifted (the CIC on a good day deals with no more than 2,000 visitors and footfall figures at the CIC are not affected by the deployment of the Guides)
• Staff across the organisation learnt about City and London visitor product and have become ambassadors in their daily lives; their knowledge increases their own employability

The not-so positive results

• Guides are sometimes put off from turning up if there is adverse weather or difficulties with weekend transport, meaning CIC are not always able to put out a full complement
• The mobile electric van has broken down on a number of occasions and caused significant effort to get back to its garage and repair
• Co-ordinating training times across multiple departments can be difficult

This was a new way of working for the City’s visitor teams and there has been some positive surprise about the interest and support shown by staff from across the organisation.

The pan-organisational team effort engages employees who have no tourism or cultural remit with the visitor function and enables them to be a part of it, encouraging ownership and civic pride.

“This was a new way of working for the City’s visitor teams and there has been some positive surprise about the interest and support shown by staff from across the organisation.”
Challenges and Lessons Learnt

- An electric van is not the best vehicle for occasional or sporadic use, it needs running every week to ensure the battery retains effective power
- While receiving ToI and so, in effect, working, some Guides do not view their “volunteering” as being as important and requiring as much diligence as their day jobs and have not shown up leaving CiC in a difficult position – the promotion of responsibility is key
- Radio contact with Guides is paramount – especially at large and complex events – always check your comms systems ahead of the event, as failure on the day can massively impact the effectiveness of the service
- Always hold an on-the-day briefing session before Guides are deployed as last minute changes to events, transport delays and other variables can be reported and discussed
- Always provide event briefing sheets for Guides – they will not remember everything and so a two-page crib sheet of what’s open that day, who’s performing and where the nearest toilets are etc. is important
- Guides are ineffective if they are passive; the public will rarely come to you – strongly encourage Guides to proactively approach visitors, especially those that look lost or in need of help
- Always have a debrief with Guides or provide mechanisms for feedback – the Guides talk to the people on the street and can give some real insights on how to run events better or provide services more effectively
- Always clear the presence of the Guides with the appropriate authorities (e.g. police and or stewarding companies deployed at the event)
- Always identify sites near to where Guides are deployed where additional literature can be deposited so that they can stock up quickly without having to schlepp back to base camp (at major events, it is sometimes effective to deploy a few people to act as leaflet runners only, responding to radio call-ins for more literature and dropping this off as appropriate)
- Guides work best in small teams of 5 or 6 with a team leader – geo locate them and let them run that area

Top Tips

1. Be prepared; if you have not done your homework, verified your briefing, delivered your training and double-checked your equipment, Guides will feel unsupported and less able to deliver
2. Create a sense of team; it is integral that Guides feel they are working together and equally with other Guides, stewards, police, performers etc. to deliver a great experience for the public
3. Provide feedback systems – Guides feel valued and you’ll get really valuable insights

For more information

Contact: Nick.Bodger@cityoflondon.gov.uk
Nick Bodger
Head of Visitor Development
City of London Corporation
This document has been developed by VisitEngland.

VisitEngland is the country's national tourist board responsible for driving forward England's Strategic Framework for Tourism with industry partners. We work in partnership to lead the development of a thriving tourism industry, supporting our national and local partners to achieve economic growth and increase investment and employment by encouraging the development of excellent visitor experiences and effective business practices. For information on the wide range of support and opportunities we offer to the different sectors involved in England's visitor economy visit visitengland.org and for further information on England, visit visitengland.com