



Sustainable Business Awards for the South East 2003

Case Study - Country Lanes

Company Background

Established in 1993, Country Lanes is a small, rural enterprise with an innovative and sustainable approach to tourism, technology and transport. The company offers cycling day trips, short breaks and longer tours with expert route advice, quality bike hire, luggage transport and overnight stays in quality accommodation.

The company has customers from all over the world and prides itself in delivering a low environmental impact but high value service to domestic and overseas visitors who would rather not hire a car to tour the UK countryside.

Sustainability Initiatives

Through more than 150 rural business partnerships and community involvement, Country Lanes provides the benefits of tourism without the damaging effects of road congestion, pollution and overcrowding at historic attractions, natural beauty spots and quiet villages. The business actively encourages its customers to reach the countryside by rail and explore it on bicycles, providing an environmentally sustainable tourism product for the 21st Century.

Key Achievements

- Significant contribution to the rural economy: £368,000 per annum and nine jobs. A wide range of local suppliers benefit from Country Lanes' passing two-wheeled trade, e.g. local shops, pubs, tearooms, and places offering accommodation.
- Vehicle use reduced by over one million miles per annum. CO₂ reduction of 328 tonnes per annum. More than 85% of customers arrive by train or bus, and 12,250 customers travel 20-25 miles per day by bicycle along quiet country lanes.
- Travel brochures eliminated in favour of electronic promotion saving £12,000, natural resources, and reducing waste.
- Secured £22,500 grant to deliver cycling benefits to the local community in Windermere, including enhancement of the cycle facility at Windermere station, cycle proficiency training through local schools, and cycle maintenance courses for adults.

Resource Efficiency

The company has eliminated traditional travel brochures in favour of electronic promotion and has achieved a dramatic reduction in print and distribution costs (£12,000 per annum) and in waste. More than 90% of bookings are taken online. The remainder are received by telephone or mail with many being redirected to the website to enter details and preferences.

All used paper is recycled.



The George Inn - Just one of many rural businesses to benefit from Country Lanes' passing two-wheel trade

Country Lanes' office and cycle centre in Brockenhurst, Hampshire is located in a renovated railway carriage at Brockenhurst Station. The company has another 1950s vintage railway carriage to be renovated for similar use.

Energy Efficiency

The use of bicycles is 'low-tech' and highly energy efficient without the inherent problems of pollution associated with motor vehicles.

Social Responsibility

Country Lanes researches all routes to ensure that cyclists have a safe, enjoyable and informative cycling experience whilst in no way adding to the problems of trail erosion or damage in environmentally sensitive areas.

The company delivers high quality, low impact tourism with cycling visitors who spread their spend throughout the rural economy.

The company has a clean health and safety record in the workplace and offers health and safety training as a feature of the Country Lanes Cycle Mechanics course. It also insists that all customers below the age of 18 wear cycle helmets.

Country Lanes has supported a number of charitable causes, organising cycle events to raise money. It also works with the National Trust, offering a two for one admission scheme, increasing the proportion of visitors who reach Trust properties by means other than private cars.

The company also raises the profile of transport integration, environmental issues and the health benefits of cycling via local and national media.



Out on the road checking routes

Supply Chain Management

Country Lanes intends to begin quizzing its suppliers about their environmental performance and sustainability in the near future. It already works very closely with all its 'partners' and suppliers to ensure that customers receive high quality, value-for-money, products and service.

Effective PR and Internet-based communication keeps all stakeholders abreast of new initiatives and business developments.

Transport

More than 85% of customers reach the start of their cycling holiday or break with Country Lanes via rail or bus.

The company works with a number of train operators to provide cycle tourism centres at three rural train stations: Brockenhurst in the New Forest; Moreton-in-Marsh in the Cotswolds; and Windermere in the Lake District. The integration of the company's cycles with rail, bus, taxi, and ferry services creates a rural 'transport hub' that benefits local residents and visitors to these areas and makes the countryside accessible to all by sustainable transport.

Company staff are recruited locally and issued with a company bicycle to use as transport to/from work and for company business.

Rural Business

Country Lanes provides the benefits of tourism to rural areas without the damaging effects of road traffic congestion, pollution and over-crowding at historic attractions, natural beauty spots and historic attractions.

£368,000 per annum is injected into the rural economy as a direct result of the company's cycle hire and holidays. Tour itineraries are designed to use less-travelled rural lanes, calling in at villages and hamlets with post offices, village shops and pubs. Smaller villages welcome this relatively quiet, low impact 'two wheeled passing trade' giving them a chance to sell local produce and increase business viability.

'Country Living' magazine recently recognised Country Lanes' owner as 'one of Britain's most enterprising rural women' who successfully confronted the devastating effects of Foot and Mouth disease, leading to business franchising and expansion plans.



Country Lanes' Office and Cycle Centre in Brockenhurst, Hampshire, located in a renovated railway carriage at Brockenhurst Station

Innovation

A new venture with Wight Link ferry service delivers cyclists from Brockenhurst to the Isle of Wight on a combined 'cycle and sail' ticket.

The company began franchising its tourism products with effect from 1st January 2003.

Engaging the public sector to facilitate the delivery of sustainable cycle tourism.

Awards

- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Business Environment Awards 2003: Winner - Sustainable Transport; Runner-up - Small Business; Highly Commended- Environmental Innovation and Technology.
- Winner of the English Tourist Board's England for Excellence Green Award for Tourism and Environmental Management.
- Cycle Mark Award for the 'Best Whole Journey Experience' to Windermere in the Lake District.
- UK Online for Business e-commerce award for 'exemplary use of electronic technology'.



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