

IDENTITY PARADE

The OK Travel name may originally have been a fashionable American import, but Go-Ahead Group ditched it in the 1990s and in the eyes of creative agency The MHD Partnership, it had become an unfashionable 'nothing' brand. Set the challenge to reinvent it for our readers, the creative team suggests this makeover — with a modesty theme — would equip it for a 21st century revival.

OK IS OKAY AGAIN



OK Motor Services — OK Travel in its latter years — was one of the rarities of the years before buses were deregulated in October 1986: a sizeable independent operator of local bus services.

Always based at Bishop Auckland in Co. Durham, it began life in 1912 as Gaunless Valley Motor Services but as it grew after World War 1, founder Wade Emmerson decided he needed a 'more peppy' trading name to stand out against increasing numbers of competitors. He remembered an expression used by the American troops with whom he had served in 1917/18 and picked OK.

By the mid-1970s it had nearly 60 vehicles, most bought new, and deregulation saw it expand to challenge the major operators in the area. By the early 1990s, it was running almost 200 vehicles, most purchased secondhand.

It became over-stretched and in March 1995 sold out to Go-Ahead Group, which three years later sold the coach side of the business and absorbed the bus business into the Go Northern part of Go North East. It closed

the Bishop Auckland depot in April 2006, but revived the identity briefly in 2012 on a couple of routes to mark the OK centenary.

'When we first looked at the old OK Travel branding we weren't convinced that continuing to have the word OK in your name was the best way to go,' says MHD Partnership's account director, Mike Fletcher. 'Why would you claim to be just "OK"? You're not setting standards of a premium brand, nor are you clearly targeting the lower end of the market. You are, by default, all set to become a "nothing" brand. And what bus company wants to be one of those?'

'So how did we get around this problem? We flipped it and turned it into a positive by adding the strapline "the modest bus company"'. Suddenly the whole concept of the company's attitude changes. It goes from "we are average, and we're quite happy with our lot in life" to "look, we know we're a good little bus company but we don't want to shout about it too much if that's all right with you".'

'A lot of time and effort was also spent investigating how the O and K letters would

work together, concluding that a simple two letter word could actually be treated more as a shape.

'A simple lower case approach was chosen to look friendlier (and less like a certain celebrity magazine) and the colours of the O and K are in stark contrast to each other for real stand-out in the brand's communication. The K has been softened by rounding off some corners and subtle curves used on the word 'travel' to complement,' he says.

'The original OK Travel livery was a mix of red and cream. Our updated version keeps the red, but brings a more contemporary feel to proceedings by ditching the old fashioned cream and replacing it with black and white.

'When designing liveries, the biggest restriction is always the windows as they reduce the space available and generally end up like a black hole in the design. We're always keen to reduce the use of contravision too, so for the benefit of the customer we tried a different technique here.

'We have incorporated the windows in the design by using black vinyl to extend them and create the illusion of a sculpted, sleek body for the bus. The diagonal lines and smoothed corners make a regular bus look much more dynamic, and particularly striking on the roads.

'Through the use of flat base colours, this design would be relatively easy to execute and maintain on a bus, while the logo and web address would be straightforward vinyls. The oklets-go.co.uk web address adds a little personality to the overall effect, leaving the new livery to compete with the best bus travel has to offer.'

Through the application of a few simple principles, he says life has returned to a dying brand. ■

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OK Travel livery on an Optare StarRider-bodied Mercedes-Benz. OPTARE