

assistant maintenance supervisor, Fred Hafner, and were built by workers at Manpower Industries. Centro is the only transit system in the state to have newspapers available on buses. Newspaper sales are a source of revenue to Centro. The availability of newspapers on all buses, including Call-a-Bus, will enhance the service for riders.

The success of any marketing promotions is best measured in terms of ridership and revenues. The Central New York Regional Transportation Authority not only has halted the decline of transit use but has registered substantial increases in ridership and revenues. The approach of other transportation systems to increase ridership and revenues has been counterproductive because they have tried to increase ridership by reducing fares.

The alternate approach to increasing revenues has been to increase fares, and that is also counterproductive because the increased fares decrease ridership. Centro has increased ridership without increasing fares.

At Centro, we are beginning to convince people that transit is essential. It aids the consumer, senior citizens, and the handicapped in times of soaring fuel costs.

Howard W. Gates, Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority, New York

In 1973 we began to set into motion a new form of public transit service, which we called PERT (personal transit) Dial-A-Bus. While our traditional fixed-route system was struggling to survive and facing a quickening financial crisis, we were about to offer the public a totally new transportation concept. We carried 745 people during the first week of operation. We now carry that many each day. The new system has flourished and increased ridership, while overall transit ridership has continued to decrease.

Why? The answer is simple. We offer the public a logical alternative, one that permits them to have the convenience of their automobiles without the high cost and aggravation of driving. A phone call will bring a clean, comfortable public transit vehicle to the front door and take the caller to work, to school, to shop, or to any one of a multitude of places at a fraction of the cost of driving. Acceptance and use of the PERT Dial-A-Bus, therefore, were achieved with a minimum of effort and expenditure on a marketing and promotional program.

A well-planned and carefully carried out marketing program will

1. Inform the public about how the system operates and what the advantages of its use are,
2. Motivate those persons in the service area to use the new system, and
3. Retain ridership once it has been achieved.

Several months before the projected starting date, the first phase of what has been a continual marketing effort began with the drafting of the basic marketing plan and a projected budget. The plan addressed 3 main questions:

1. Who are we attempting to reach?
2. How and when are we to do so?
3. What will the cost be?

SERVICE AREA

The initial service area, which was defined by a team of consultants from M.I.T., encompassed approximately 10 miles² (26 km²), primarily within the large suburban town of Greece, adjacent to the northwest section of the city of Rochester. A small segment

of the city was also included. Since that time several small expansions have increased the size of the area to approximately 12 miles² (31 km²). The factors that led to the selection of this particular area include

1. High population density (50,000),
2. Heavy industrial employment within the area (Eastman Kodak has 7,000 to 8,000 employees living and working in the service area and providing a market for home-to-work subscription service),
3. High percentage of senior citizens (5,000 to 6,000),
4. Several large shopping centers, and
5. Large public and private school systems, for which home-to-school service could be provided.

SERVICES OFFERED

The various types of service offered by the PERT Dial-A-Bus system are discussed below. Each one required specific marketing techniques.

Home-to-Work Service

Home-to-work service is a weekly subscription service that provides transportation from the doorstep to a designated plant gate and from that gate home again. A round trip each day for 5 days is offered at a cost of \$7. The subscriber calls in and arranges his or her particular trip. Service then begins and continues until canceled. Daily, single-trip service is also available as long as the caller places a request with the control center by 2:00 p.m. the previous afternoon so that the trip can be worked into a route. Payment is handled through the fare box on the first day of each week when the subscriber pays the full amount for the week and is given a color-coded pass good for that week.

Home-to-School Service

Home-to-school service fills the void left for those who are ineligible for Yellow School Bus service because of distance limitations. In our service area there are several sections that do not have sidewalks, and some of the smaller school children have rather long and hazardous walks. Parents have demanded some kind of service, and thus we developed this specialized service. It is handled in the same manner as home-to-work service, at a rate of \$5 per week, for most school trips are shorter than work trips. The children pay on the first day and receive their passes for the week. Single trips are also available if arranged for the preceding day.

Feed-a-Bus Service

Feed-a-bus service is so named because it is feeder service to regular bus routes in the service area. It too is handled on a weekly subscription basis or a daily, single-trip basis. The weekly rate is \$7.50, which includes transfer to the regular route bus.

Dial-a-Bus Service

Dial-a-bus service, of course, is the general point-to-point service within the service area.

MARKETING TECHNIQUE

Two basic marketing and promotional approaches have been employed throughout the various phases of the program.

1. The "rifle" approach consists of elements that are directed exclusively toward residents within the service area and that include direct mail, local newspaper advertisements, on-board handouts, appearances before groups and organizations, and reduced-fare incentive program.
2. The "shotgun" approach uses advertisements in mass-circulation daily newspapers and on radio and television, outdoor advertising, and news releases and press conferences.

The rifle approach has been used far more extensively than the shotgun approach because it was felt that 90 percent of the subscribers to the widely circulated daily papers and a similar broad audience of radio and television do not live in the service area and much of the high cost of areawide mass media advertising would be lost. A better approach seemed to be the concentration of our efforts and budget directly within the service area. Only recently have we begun to place an occasional advertisement in the daily papers and on radio.

All during the preservice marketing and promotion program, we received heavy areawide newspaper, radio, and television coverage. Since then, coverage has been sporadic, and occasional areawide advertising is used not only to increase ridership but also to continue a general awareness of our unique service and perhaps sharpen the desire for it to expand.

MARKETING PROGRAM

The initial marketing plan called for 3 phases encompassing a period of about 5 months. Service was set to begin on August 6, 1973, and marketing activities began in April, building to a 4-week, areawide promotional campaign before the start of service and a follow-up or continuing initial program extending some 6 weeks after the start of service.

Phase 1

Phase 1 covered the period from April through June and centered on direct contact with the various publics involved: public officials (state, county, town), employers within the service area, community groups and organizations, and the news media. Each was fully informed of all aspects of the new service. A slide presentation about Dial-A-Bus and how it works was prepared and presented before more than 50 community and industrial groups and also public officials.

Special note should be given to preservice efforts with the Eastman Kodak Company, the major employer in the service area. Kodak's central production complex, known as Kodak Park, is situated in the southern corner of the service area and presents a ready home-to-work market. Early contact was made with company officials, and they agreed to cooperate by mailing a Dial-A-Bus survey to all Kodak employees living in the service area and working at Kodak Park. We supplied the survey material, and Kodak did the rest. The positive responses then gave us a mailing list for initial promotion by direct mail. Kodak also permitted us to place home-to-work subscription registration cards and other materials at central locations throughout the large industrial complex and included good coverage of the new service in the heavily read Kodakery, the company's internal weekly paper. This early phase 1 work with a major employer laid a solid groundwork for home-to-work subscription service, which has become a vital part of daily PERT service.

Phase 2

The major preservice promotion began 4 weeks before the start of service. Direct mail took a major part of our overall budget, but we were determined to reach every man, woman, and child within the PERT service area. A well-designed brochure mailed to every home in the service area accomplished much of that aim. The multi-color brochure gave full information about PERT Dial-A-Bus, including a map and pressure-sensitive telephone tabs.

Several other brochures were developed during this period to promote the specific services. They were distributed at meetings and from plastic "take one" holders, which were distributed to all stores and professional offices in the service area.

A series of newspaper advertisements on a central theme, "We're Coming to Get You," appeared in all 3 local publications during the preservice promotional period; each one added new information. Outdoor billboards were also used with the same theme and the same style of gradual addition of information.

Something absolutely basic to our entire approach to marketing is that we are marketing personal service, and all our marketing efforts carefully and with premeditation dwell heavily on the personal pronouns "we" and "you." It makes a significant difference in overcoming the built-in resistance most people have to public transit in general and bus service in particular.

As the mailing and advertising were carried out, phase 1 activities continued. Appearances were made before groups and organizations, and promotion was prepared of the first cooperative, reduced fare to be offered after the start of service to the area's largest shopping center. Meetings were held with the Merchants' Association and owners of all shopping centers in the service area to inform them about the service and to elicit their support in terms of promotion and special programs for reduced fares and free telephone installation for customer use. The 2 largest centers agreed to free telephones at their expense, and the initial reduced-fare special in the form of a late August half-fare discount coupon available at all stores in the largest plaza was agreed on.

Preparations were made to introduce the first vehicles to the community. A "Lunch by Bus" invitation was prepared for all news media representatives and key public officials. On a hot summer day about 2 weeks before service started, 2 of the first air-conditioned Dial-A-Bus vehicles picked up the guests at a central downtown location and carried them on the inaugural ride to a restaurant within the service area. During lunch the service was described by transit officials and M.I.T. consultants. Press kits with complete information and photos were distributed before the return trip. The effort resulted in good coverage by all media, including strong editorial support.

Phase 2 of the initial program concluded with the first day of PERT service. A ribbon-cutting ceremony at the door of the first vehicle to go into service brought public officials from state, county, and town levels to a main Kodak Company gate to participate with Kodak and transit representatives. Again, the news media gave good coverage not only to the public relations but to the first day of service itself. About 100 passengers were carried on the first day and, as stated earlier, 745 rode during the first 5-day service week.

Phase 3

The initial marketing plan and budget called for postservice activities to encompass a 6-week period. Newspaper ads were continued, and industrial subscription service sign-up work went on within Kodak.

In addition, contact was made with public and private school officials and PTA groups to secure their support and assistance for home-to-school service. Several meetings were held with various groups and individuals, distribution of the home-to-school brochure was agreed on as was a detailed article on Dial-A-Bus service in the central school newsletter, which was mailed to all residents before the start of school. Specific newspaper advertisements were also used in the 2 weeks before the start of school.

This year a new dimension to school service was created: A Dial-A-Bus plan is available to those taking evening adult education courses at one of the large high schools in the service area. All literature issued by the school district pertaining to courses offered contains promotion of a package Dial-A-Bus program. The students may sign up for home-to-class and return service once a week for the 10-week course and pay the additional amount. The number now taking Dial-A-Bus to evening sessions is steadily growing.

Details of the first incentive program were worked out in early August with the major shopping centers. It was offered during the last days of August, coordinating with the shopping mall's "Back to School Days." Half-fare coupons were available in all stores and were good for the return trip. Drivers were instructed to accept them only from passengers boarding at the mall. At the end of the special week the Merchants' Association was billed for all coupons taken in during that period.

In the weeks following the start of service, plastic telephone dialers in the PERT yellow and blue colors were given wide distribution at shopping centers and in stores and offices. They were printed with the PERT telephone number. Along with the continuing distribution of telephone stickers, they put the Dial-A-Bus message in the home at the telephone.

INITIAL EFFORTS COMPLETED

By mid-September all 4 services were in operation, and ridership was growing. The 5-month period of planning and implementation of an initial marketing and promotional plan had been completed. Major goals of widespread awareness of the service and initial acceptance had been achieved. The continuing task of creative marketing designed to build the doorstep transit service ridership now presented the challenge during the ensuing months.

INCENTIVE MARKETING

The first major effort to gain increased ridership with a systemwide discount fare came in November as the weather worsened, making the driving more of a chore. A household direct mailing was made to 17,000 homes in the service area. The oversized postcard announced Half-Fare or 50/50 Week. Anyone calling for a bus during the promotion week rode for half fare during the off-peak hours of 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

The promotion brought significant results, lifting the overall weekly level of ridership at that time from approximately 1,700 to more than 2,000. More significant was the fact that ridership remained at the new level after the promotion and never again fell below 2,000.

Two similar half-fare promotions have been offered since the first one a year ago, and each time the overall weekly ridership settles back to a significantly higher level after the promotion than had been experienced prior to its start. Other specific fare incentives have produced increased ridership. A special discount week for home-to-work subscription service brought new riders as did a similar incentive fare for use of feed-a-bus service.

SENIOR CITIZEN PROGRAMS

Since the start of service, 2 major senior citizen high-rise housing developments have been occupied.

A shopper's special program was developed shortly after the first residents moved in, and a local supermarket chain paid the full cost of a weekly shopping trip from the developments to a shopping center in the service area. Demand has grown to the point that 3 vehicles are now being used each Thursday morning for the shopping trip.

SPECIAL CHARTERS AND GROUP RIDERSHIP

Other markets, such as industrial and school charter work, have been explored to advantage. Eastman Kodak groups and other industrial employees in the area often take Dial-A-Bus to lunch or a special meeting, using the group travel fare that has been developed to encourage multiple ridership. With group ridership, the first person pays the full fare of \$1. Each additional rider pays 25 cents when all are traveling to the same destination. This way, a group of 20, for instance, rides for \$5.75. It costs us no more to pick up 1 passenger or 20 when called, and, therefore, it is a tremendous marketing device, which also means additional revenue. Schools within the area also take advantage of the Dial-A-Bus charter for class field trips, such as retail training at stores in the area. Chartering a Dial-A-Bus for special trips is less expensive than chartering one of the yellow buses.

EXPANSION AND INTEGRATION

The original service area has been expanded several times, and Dial-A-Bus service has been integrated with fixed routes in the service area. Each action has called for specific marketing and promotion for those affected. Direct mail still serves as the central technique. In addition, on-board informational pieces, newspaper advertising, and news releases have also been used.

SUMMARY

In marketing Dial-A-Bus, we attempted to sell a service but we also attempted to persuade those who would use it to change their habits and life-styles. This is a particularly challenging task in view of the entire country's love affair with the automobile. We had to show them that Dial-A-Bus is a logical alternative.

Our experience in Rochester, where a growing number of persons are making the transition to PERT each week, proves that it can be done. Nothing, however, is harder to sell than a "gold brick," and it is far more difficult without a sound, well-planned and financed marketing program.

We found the rifle approach to marketing to be the most successful one. As our service area grows, we will turn more to mass media.

We found that laying a strong foundation of support and cooperation from the various publics involved before the start of service does much to enhance success. Strong lines of communication must also be maintained on a constant basis.

Effective fare-incentive promotion, we found, can produce ridership increases that last as more people try the service.