Traditional/Bus Tour Operators

Traditional group and bus tour operators face the challenges associated with transporting their customers often over long distances or to multiple destinations, and typically within a short timeframe. Technological advancements are helping to address these challenges, particularly with the advent of hybrid vehicles and the increasing availability of alternative fuels such as ethanol and biodiesel. But your company may also be able to reduce emissions and cut costs with strategic route planning and staff education.

Quick Start

For group tours, use hotels that are situated near the attractions and restaurants to which you are travelling. Grouping the locations will allow you to save money on fuel and transportation time, which will in turn leave your customers with more time for sightseeing. In some large urban centres, you may be able to choose hotels and restaurants within walking distance of sightseeing locations. Walking tours save you money on bus transport, slash greenhouse gas emissions to almost nothing, and give your travellers a bonus experience to add to their vacation memories.

Case Study: The Greasy Rider

NorthVan Green Tours offers tours of the North Vancouver area and Whistler, British Columbia, with a modified Toyota hybrid SUV. Owner and operator Eric Williamson modified the vehicle's engine to run on used vegetable oil sourced from local restaurants. Williamson offers his customers personalized tours, and along the way stops to "gas up" at local restaurants and concession stands, which also gives him a chance to educate his customers on the benefits of biofuels.

Transportation

For traditional tour operators, transportation represents the single greatest sustainability challenge. Here are several tips on how you can reduce your footprint while maintaining a successful business.

- Plan efficient routes that minimize drive time. Try variations of your usual route to see if a shorter or more efficient path exists.
- Encourage walking and cycling between nearby attractions, restaurants and hotels to give your customers another way to experience their vacation.
- Ensure that all vehicles are well maintained and serviced regularly. A well-tuned engine will deliver better fuel mileage, lowering emissions and saving you money.
- Dispose of all hazardous vehicle wastes in accordance with provincial and federal laws.

Biofuels 101

Biofuels are fuels made from renewable resources such as plant materials. When burned, biofuels produce fewer heat-trapping greenhouse gases than petroleum-based fuels. Two common biofuels that are currently used for vehicles are ethanol and biodiesel.

Ethanol is most commonly produced in North America from corn. Many gasoline companies currently blend gasoline with ethanol (usually 15% ethanol), while more are planning on doing so in the near future. Ethanol production is a contentious issue. When making a fuel decision for your company, review recent information relevant to your local area and make a decision that works best for you both financially and environmentally.

Biodiesel is a small-but-growing segment of the alternative fuels market. While ethanol comes from plant-based sources, biodiesel is derived from vegetable oil or animal fats. Examples include soybeans, canola oil or waste such as used cooking oils. Biodiesel is still a relatively new technology, but one that is becoming increasingly available. When evaluating what is best for your company, make sure you check what facilities exist in your area.

- Consider purchasing or leasing hybrid electric vehicles for your fleet to save both fuel expenses and emissions.
- Don't idle vehicles. See the fact sheet below, and share it with your drivers.

Product Design

- Design tours to visit regions/attractions/restaurants/hotels that have (or are implementing) sustainable practices.
- Showcase the local art, food, crafts and shops-support the local economy.
- Inform potential customers of your sustainable practices through your website and catalogue.
- Think about where you run tours, and any potential negative impacts they may have on the local environment. Consider the size and number of your groups, or alternative routes or destinations. Remember that damage to the place will in the long run damage your business.

Vehicle Washing

- Wash vehicles with biodegradable cleansers.
- Implement a "grey water" collection system to wash your buses.
- Consider a "greener" vehicle-washing establishment if the option exists in your area; many of these businesses now offer biodegradable soaps, washing-water filtration and reuse, and water treatment to ensure no chemicals make their way into storm drains.

Going Nowhere Fast: A Few Facts About Idling

Idling vehicles are not only a major source of greenhouse-gas emissions, they are also a waste of fuel and money.

Reasons People Idle:

- To heat up or cool down the cabin for passengers
- Drivers were originally taught not to turn off diesel engines
- Mistaken belief that idling is easier on the engine, and that turning the engine on and off prematurely wears the starter motor
- Mistaken belief that restarting a vehicle produces more pollution than allowing it to idle
- Misperception that the engine must be warmed up before driving.

Idle Realities

- Idling for more than five minutes for a diesel engine is not an effective way to warm up a bus even in cold weather. The quickest way to warm the engine is to drive at regular speeds. This also cuts down on wear and tear on engine parts from having to work at lower speeds.
- Modern gas engines require no more than 30 seconds to warm up, even in cold Canadian winters.
- Excessive idling can actually damage engine components, including cylinders, spark plugs and exhaust systems.
- Frequent re-starting has little impact on engine components such as the battery and the starter motor, yet idling for more than 10 seconds costs more than turning off an engine and restarting it.
- Depending on the weather, many buses will maintain a comfortable interior temperature for awhile without idling. Schedule tours in a way that passengers and drivers do not need to spend a lot of extra time on the bus.
- A recent EPA study of school buses found that emissions measured after a vehicle was re-started contained less carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and other pollutants than they did after the bus had idled continuously over a 10-minute period. The analysis indicated that continuous idling for more than three minutes emitted more fine particulates (soot) than at re-start.