



business profile

White Van Man - on yer Bike



Can bicycles make a comeback delivering products and services? Gary Armstrong, business development manager of city courier firm Outspoken Delivery, thinks so ...

Back in the days before the motor vehicle was ubiquitous on our roads, the transport method of choice for most people and local businesses was the bicycle. In a modern world full of the latest technological advances, could we be seeing a renaissance in the humble two-wheeled transport option? Will the local baker and butcher find themselves back on a bicycle? And could the large multinational carriers such as TNT and DHL find themselves using bicycles for the last mile of their deliveries?

While bicycles currently form only a very small percentage of the nations' mode of transport, there are areas where cycling is a serious matter with a strong culture. In Cambridge, for example, over 23% of the working population commute to work by bike and there are similar cycling communities scattered around the country, such as York, Oxford, Bath and Bristol. Even London in recent years has seen a remarkable increase in cycling due in part to the implementation of impressive infrastructure projects such as the bike hire scheme and the opening of bicycle super-highways.

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There are many tangible and intangible benefits associated with adopting bicycles for deliveries and service provision. With the price of fuel at a premium, the low running costs of a bicycle mean operators like Outspoken are able to offer better rates than their van-based competitors. But it's not just economics. With better access to the city centre, bicycles offer more flexible delivery windows and give local council bosses something to cheer about – less polluted, less congested and more liveable town centres. Who wouldn't want to see fewer vans on our streets? And with fit riders who clearly love a day's workout, customers get to receive their goods from a cheery cyclist who brings a natural enthusiasm to the job.

In addition to promoting the delivery of freight by bike the CYCLElogistics project involves a number of areas of work including encouraging tradespeople to adopt bicycles as a means of transporting themselves and their equipment to their customers - and prompting individuals to use their bikes for shopping trips by showcasing appropriate baskets, bags, trailers and specialist cargo bikes such as the 8-freight we use in our delivery operations.



Despite some vast improvements in recent years, cycling is still not seen as a serious transport option in many areas. But for congested city centres, the bicycle is proving it can offer a multitude of benefits. The European Union has got wind of this and is putting its weight behind it. The question it wants answered is, could there be a new position within logistics for the bicycle? The pan European project, CYCLElogistics (www.cyclelogistics.eu) has come together with the aim of reducing energy use by getting more freight bikes doing the sort of deliveries that many of us are used to doing by car or van. Outspoken has been asked to be a project partner through our experience as one of the largest cycle courier operations in the UK.

Our main task will be in extending and developing our own delivery model and to promote it to other operations throughout Europe. We currently use cargo bikes which carry up to 60kg loads but we are in talks with some of the national operators to offer "last mile" logistics on much larger trikes that can carry loads of up to 250kg. These operate like a small van but are more flexible and importantly for a town like Cambridge, mean that they can access the city centre at all times. For a national carrier, the last mile can be a major headache. We offer a solution to this most difficult section of their journey by accepting goods at a local depot on the edge of town

It's great to have Cambridge in the limelight for this and it is fair to say that we are already a leader in the UK for the take up and use of cargo bikes, not just as couriers. The Dutch Bike shop in Cambridge has been doing a roaring trade over the last few years with Cambridge parents flocking to use the Bakfiets cargo bikes to transport their children, shopping and other goods. It really is the most sensible way of moving most stuff around our city.

What we need to realise now is that the bicycle really is a serious choice for transporting goods and services around city centres. As businesses, we need to welcome this change and be active in ensuring the bicycle becomes an integral link in the logistics chain.