



HOW YOU CAN
**POWER
STEER**
YOUR **BUS**iness

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INTRODUCTION

Power steering makes driving a vehicle easier, faster and lighter. **What if you could make driving your business forward easier, faster and lighter too?**

Remember driving back in the days when power steering was not standard-issue in the majority of vehicles?

Trying to get out of a tight parallel parking spot, where the cars in front and behind you have inconsiderately parked extremely close to your bumpers, was a nightmare with manual steering.

Trying to make a quick U-turn on a major road while facing down a horde of oncoming cars was a real test of your biceps (and nerves).

Travelling on a bumpy, pothole-filled road would result in the car shuddering in and out of your lane unless you held on to the wheel with a vice-like grip. And let's not forget three-point turns, where it felt like forever before you finally got the steering wheel all the way to the left or right.

Manual Steering

{mənyuəl stɪərɪŋ}

1. A system in which manual force is used for steering.

In short, it was a bit of a relief when automotive technology moved on to power steering and you no longer had to worry about taking too long to manoeuvre or being unable to exert enough manual force quickly.

Similarly, trying to drive a bus company to success through manual efforts is time-consuming, labour-intensive and expensive:

- ⊕ Your employees spend too much time on data entry or transferring information from one place to another.
- ⊕ The departments in your company have little awareness of opportunities for cooperation or efficiencies.
- ⊕ Human error results in preventable mistakes like missing charter bookings or forgetting to schedule a replacement for drivers on leave.
- ⊕ If a key staff member retires or goes on leave, business doesn't run as smoothly as usual because key knowledge has gone with them.
- ⊕ Audits or investigations by external parties are a nightmare because it takes ages to pull all the information together from numerous sources.

Fortunately, it is possible to overcome these challenges with an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solution that is tailor-made for bus operators. Just as power steering makes light work of keeping your bus steady and safe on its journey, a bus-specific ERP will help your business progress on the road to success with less effort. Here's how.

1. DRIVE FASTER, SMOOTHER, LIGHTER

When you compare manual steering to power steering, you'll notice that the wheel feels heavier and you have to use quite a lot of force to move it around. Not only does it take more effort to do anything; your response time is also correspondingly slower.

In a small car, this may be something you can put up with. However, as you go up a few weight classes and get into the heavy vehicle category, you'll find it more and more difficult to steer.

This is a good analogy for bus companies. If you're a small business, you probably won't have trouble getting by with manual processes, paper records and a few spreadsheets. You'll have a few really good employees that know more or less everything, who can be relied upon to solve problems and answer questions as they come up.



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SAPPHIRE COAST SCALES UP

“ We were just hanging in there at the size that we were. We knew that if we wanted to get any bigger, we needed to change the system. It wasn't sustainable.

We got Trapeze to demonstrate their software to us and we were just blown away by it. The fact that the charter module talks to the debtor module, and the fleet management module talks to the creditors module – that was the missing link that we were searching for.

Our operations staff could do their jobs quicker, services in the workshop became more simplified and we could make claims more effectively. ”

Jamie Klemm, Managing Director

As you grow though, you'll encounter increasing difficulty. Key staff members can't be everywhere at once, and because there is little documentation or formal processes it takes new employees longer to get up to speed. Doing payroll manually for 20 people is tedious but manageable; doing it for 200 is a different story. In the workshop, keeping track of servicing requirements for 10 buses is relatively easy – but that changes once your fleet grows to 50.

As your teams get bigger, they get less efficient because they don't have a central place to get information – they are either constantly interrupting their colleagues, sending emails or organising meetings to get what they need from each other.

The increase in size also increases complexity: where it may have been easy to keep your finger on the pulse before, your visibility across the organisation decreases as it grows. Making decisions and doing strategic planning will become a whole lot harder, as gathering all the data you need to make informed decisions feels like a monumental task.

Shifting from manual to digital will make a huge difference in the amount of time and effort you need to put in to run your business. Just as the wheel feels lighter and easier to turn quickly with power steering, the right ERP system will save you time, effort and money by automating functions, smoothening out interdepartmental communication and serving as a digital repository of all your company information.

Find out more about
resolving communication
issues in

TECH TIP:

Look for a solution that works well across all your departments instead of multiple discipline-specific systems that don't talk to each other. You'll save on expensive software integration costs as well as licenses, plus you'll only need to deal with one vendor if you have any issues.

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VENTURA CONQUERS COMMUNICATION

“The business was looking for a consolidated software for record-keeping to ensure that everything was recorded in a way where we could easily access the data.

Trapeze’s ERP lets you do everything in the one system. You’ve got everything you need in one place.

For anything I need to know, I just log into the Trapeze ERP system.”

Omar Najmeddine, General Manager Rail / Business Systems

2. STAY WITHIN YOUR LANE EFFORTLESSLY

Compliance with regulations, standards and awards is a major concern for most bus operators. There are laws around Work, Health & Safety (WHS), such as driver fatigue management; employment conditions as per enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs); financial reporting obligations around taxation and superannuation; the list goes on.

With so many rules and regulations to work within, it's no surprise that compliance is a struggle if you are reliant on manual processes. It's

all too easy to accidentally type the wrong number into financial records when transferring data and pay someone the wrong amount, or schedule someone to work more time than they should within 48 hours.

Mistakes are only human, but some mistakes are too costly to make. For example, if one of your buses is involved in an accident and your company is found to be in breach of driver fatigue laws, the consequences for people in the chain of responsibility could be as

serious as jail time and hefty fines. This could ruin your company, not to mention unnecessarily expose your passengers and other road users to danger.

Interested in driver fatigue? Learn more in

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Throwing more people at the problem is not a solution, as responsibility for compliance usually goes across departments – it requires everyone to do the right thing. It isn't practical to expect every employee to memorise all regulations, standards and policies to prevent breaches. What you need are good processes that ensure everyone operates within the parameters and an ERP system that lets you set business rules to enforce compliance.

While it takes some time and investment to get this set up properly, the benefits of eliminating human error more than make up for it. Furthermore, by using a software solution, you will be creating a digital audit trail that can be easily retrieved should you need to prove your compliance to the transport authorities or defend your company in a dispute.

Think of your ERP as power steering for compliance. Similar to how power steering in your car improves responsiveness and absorbs road shocks so that you can easily stay within your lane, an ERP makes staying within the straight and narrow easier for your company.

TECH TIP:

Using a solution from a vendor that specialises in public transport will help you stay abreast of regulatory changes and industry best practice. They're more likely to be aware of issues that affect the bus industry and willing to update their software accordingly as part of ongoing development.

3. CHANGE DIRECTION AND ADAPT MORE EASILY

If you've been at the last few public transport industry events, you'll have noticed the numerous trends affecting bus operators: changing passenger expectations as seen in the move towards demand response and Mobility as a Service (MaaS), and new technology like autonomous vehicles and artificial intelligence-assisted big data analytics.

While the following megatrends don't always make headlines at bus conferences, they are definitely ones to prepare for as they directly impact you:

- ⊕ **Digitisation and automation is now standard.** It's now no longer a case of going digital to gain an advantage – with most businesses using technology to gain efficiency, sticking to manual means getting left behind.
- ⊕ **An ageing workforce.** *The majority of bus industry employees* are aged 51 – 60 years; it's only a matter of time before they retire. Do you have a knowledge transfer and business continuity strategy?
- ⊕ **Increasingly strict legislation.** The bus industry is heavily regulated and subject to numerous laws and requirements, such as driver fatigue legislation, safety standards and contract KPIs. This is in addition to financial reporting as required by any business.

Technological, regulatory and generational changes are as inevitable as they are unstoppable. Any bus operator keen to keep ahead of the race needs to be able to adapt and evolve with the times.

While the abovementioned challenges may seem overwhelming at first, they can be overcome by using an ERP to record, organise, store and report on data and to standardise or automate processes.

Just as power steering helps a driver handle twists and turns on the road more easily, an ERP that works across your entire business will help you adapt to the changes and challenges ahead.

You'll be able to streamline your business and make improvements to improve efficiency, for instance by harvesting *business intelligence* to inform decision-making, and codify organisational knowledge so that new employees can pick up where their predecessors left off. This integrated approach enables consistency and structure so you can get your house in order and ensure smooth running. It'll also be much easier to pull reports for audits or investigations.

TECH TIP:

A bus-specific system will have the advantage of needing less customisation as it will already have most of your basic necessities out of the box. This will save you time (deployment will not take as long) and money (spend less on consultant fees and development work).

Keen to learn more about this? Explore further in

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READY TO POWER STEER YOUR BUSINESS?

By making your bus operation more efficient, compliant and adaptable, you'll reduce your costs significantly and improve your profitability. This puts you in a better position to grow your business and scale effectively, plus gives you an advantage if you're looking to acquire or sell.

If you want to power up your bus company, you'll need to choose the right tool for the job. Just as different power steering systems are used for vehicles with different applications, you need to make sure that you use the right software solution for your business.



Interested in buying or selling? Check out:

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KEOLIS DOWNER'S INTEGRATED SOLUTION

We have been using the Trapeze Planning & Scheduling software and Enterprise Resource Planning system in Western Australia and South Australia for over 20 years. »

Jonathan Cook, Managing Director

While every bus operation has its unique requirements, here are a few general tips to remember when you are evaluating various ERP systems:

- ⊕ **Big is not always better.** There are plenty of ERP systems by globally-known IT brands out there, but be aware that these systems are intentionally generic so they can be applied to any industry. You will need to employ a specialist firm to customise your instance and pay for any further fixes or upgrades that you need in the future.
- ⊕ **Think ahead to the next 10 or 15 years.** If you end up with a heavily-customised system, any developments or improvements by the vendor will likely be of little use to you. Your system will eventually grow stale and outdated, and finally become unfit for use. Ask potential technology partners how they will help you avoid obsolescence.
- ⊕ **Great customer care is critical.** It's not all about the software! Who will look after you once implementation is over? Ask potential vendors if their customer service and support teams have direct experience working in the bus industry and speak your language – or if you'll need to explain your business in full every time you phone them for help.

With big changes on the horizon for the bus industry, it's an exciting era for bus operators. There are plenty of opportunities to seize and challenges to navigate, and organisations equipped to do both will have a significant competitive advantage. If you want to power steer your business to greater profitability and productivity, an ERP that is tailor-made for bus could be the solution.

The Trapeze ERP system was created specifically for bus and has been refined over 30 years to keep up with industry requirements. It includes traditional ERP software capabilities such as finance, payroll and human resources, as well as bus-specific features such as workshop, day of operations and fleet management. It lets you manage your entire bus operation in a single piece of software so information flows seamlessly across your organisation.

Trapeze Group works with public transport agencies and their communities to develop and deliver smarter, more effective public transport solutions. For more than 25 years, Trapeze has been here for the journey, evolving with our customers around the world to help them move people from point A to Z, and everywhere in between.

info@trapezegrup.com.au
www.trapezegrup.com.au

Australia +617 3129 2092
1300 663 662

Middle East +971 4 252 6640

India +91 98104 07444

France +33 1 46 46 12 01

US +01 319 743 1000

Canada +01 905 629 8727

UK +44 0 8445 616 771

Switzerland +41 58 911 11 11

