

Best News

January 2001

Group News

In April 1991, The Best Connection opened for business; at that time there were seven people who were working from five rooms in Tyseley. Nearly 10 years later, three of those who started then are still with us – Matthew Burford, Andy Redfern and Samantha Truman.

Dave Schilling and Richard Leech were also with us at the beginning. They however, decided to leave to "further their life experiences" but were soon welcomed back. That makes five out of seven – not a bad retention record!!

There were some others and as one of them I am really proud of how the business has turned out. In the first 12 months our turnover was a little under £500,000. Last week was a record for us, when our turnover was a little over £1,000,000 – more than double our first year!

We now have nearly 200 full time persons working in 22 offices throughout England. At any one time on average we have 4,000 temporary workers in 1,000 client premises. Each week we carry out 750 interviews, fill 1,750 bookings, process 4,500 time sheets and answer 17,500 telephone calls.

In the year 2000, we had our best year ever with a growth in business of 42% over the



previous year. This year we are budgeting for a turnover of more than £50 million and plans are in place to open five new offices.

All this has been achieved as a result of extremely hard work. **Everybody is responsible for this terrific success and I would like to congratulate each and every one of you.** With your help and commitment we can become the market leader within our sector.

As we start a new year, which will undoubtedly set new records, I wish you all the best of luck and invite you and your partner to our tenth birthday party on Saturday March 31st at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

See you there!

Andrew C Sweeney
Chief Executive Officer

Customer services proves a success with clients

Since achieving ISO certification in 1997, The Best Connection has operated an independent, "pro-active" customer services department.

Our commitment to customer satisfaction is born out of the fact that specific processes have been included in our procedures manual since day one.

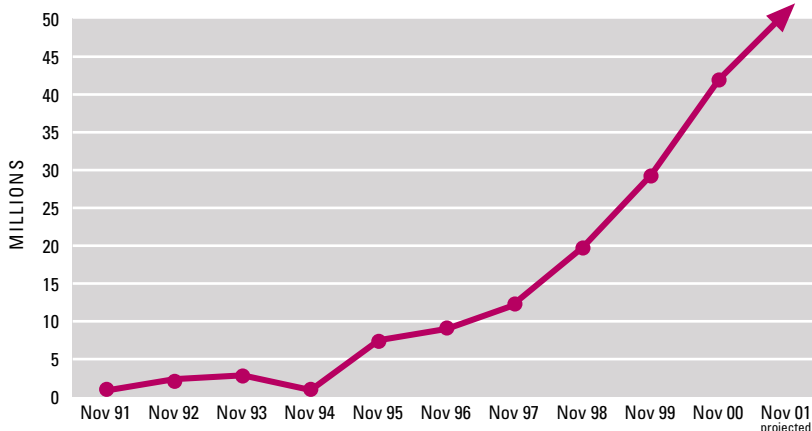
We are pleased to say that when the standards are changed in the near future, thereby making it a requirement for all ISO approved companies to operate a formal system of customer service, we can say hand on heart that this has been a part of our operating procedures for the past three years.



Headed by Tony Gabriel, the department is totally independent and is not an extension of the sales, or any other function. This independence gives customer service a whole new meaning.

Tony Gabriel commented: "Many of our clients are pleasantly surprised to find that after a call from customer services they have not been sold to, or pressurised in any way, but instead have been invited to make comments regarding the quality of service we provide. This frank ex-change of information helps us to see our service more accurately from the client's perspective."

THE BEST CONNECTION GROUP LIMITED: TURNOVER



HGV TEST:

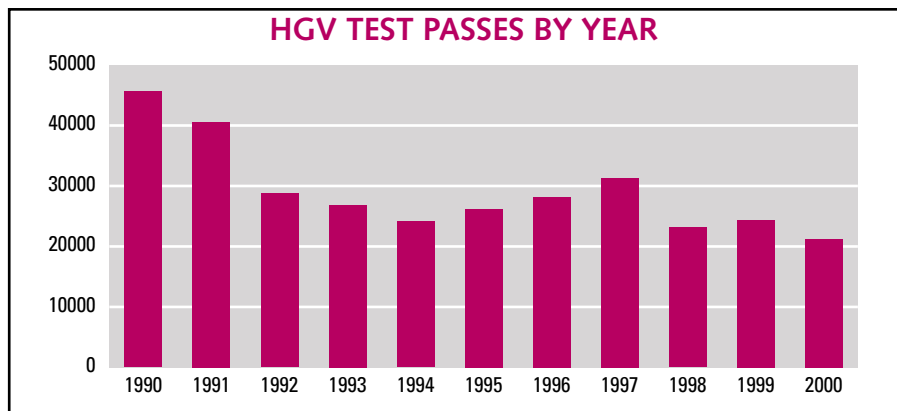
Pass rates up, but numbers down

During the past 10 years HGV business has steadily increased and now accounts for a major part of our business. As a result, we can anticipate annual trends of peaks in demand, although we cannot predict the growth rate of our clients.

Each year we recruit as many drivers as possible that meet our stringent selection criteria and although we take on greater numbers than the previous year, every year we experience a shortfall. It seems that the more we recruit, the more we need. This phenomenon is not isolated to The Best Connection, but is common throughout the whole of the transport sector.

Changing Markets

Our forecasts take into account changes in industry such as the advent of Sunday shopping and Supermarkets open 24 hours, plus an increase in the number of manufacturers operating Just in Time. These factors, coupled with the growth of home delivery and parcel services, have changed the face of the transport industry, forcing many operators to



maximise the running time of their fleet while minimising the occasions when a vehicle is off road.

Vehicles running 24 hours a day, seven days per week, require considerably more availability of drivers and general staff to ensure that they meet legal requirements and operate at full capacity. Operators now use sophisticated techniques to squeeze every last ounce of productivity from their machinery. Fleet management may be becoming a science, but manning their fleet has, for many operators, become an uphill battle.

The last ten years have seen a real increase in both licensing of heavy goods vehicles and the numbers employed in the transport sector, but recent figures from the Driving Standards Agency suggest an underlying factor behind the difficulties confronting

this sector. Fewer people are choosing to become HGV drivers and this is compounding the already serious shortfall of skills within the transport industry.

10,000 Shortfall in new HGV Drivers

In 1999/2000, the number of HGV test passes fell to a ten year low of **21,000**. This equates to a 10% reduction on the previous year and about 50% on 1990/1991 levels.

The numbers taking the HGV test last year fell to **40,000**, compared with **80,000** ten years ago. Although the figures for both taking and passing the HGV test have fallen, the pass rate percentage has improved slightly, from 50% in 1990, to almost 53% now. The Freight Transport Association estimates that in order "to maintain the current level of HGV

Matthew looks back on 10 years

There have been a lot of changes at The Best Connection over the past ten years and one man who is more aware of this than most, is Tyseley HGV branch manager, Matthew Burford.



Matthew joined as the company's one and only HGV recruitment consultant back in April 1991 when he worked alongside Martin Recci.

"The whole marketplace was totally different from today," said Matthew. "Mobile phones were really just taking off at that time and were by no means considered essential for a recruitment consultant to be able to do their job. In addition, and contrary to today, there were always lots of drivers available and often not enough business to utilise them," he continued.

Average charge rates have had their fair share of changes too. For instance, today a Class 1 driver can expect to receive around double the hourly rate they could have previously expected and in fact, even with such an increase in rates, nowadays there is a critical shortage of drivers which can at times make it difficult to fulfil a client's requirements.

Matthew continued: "A combination of hard work, perseverance and intense canvassing to companies in order to sell our services taught us the importance of both targeting the best prospects and forwarding only suitable candidates."

Matthew's career progress continued with his promotion to senior consultant in 1994 and divisional manager in 1997. Matthew became HGV branch manager in 1999 with responsibility for all of the Birmingham area including Redditch, Worcester and Droitwich.

"The changes I have witnessed have led to many improvements, particularly with the introduction of ISO 9002 throughout the company. This, coupled with the reputation that we have steadily developed has led us to be regarded as one of the market leaders and this has helped us to obtain prestigious blue chip clients that our drivers want to work for."

According to Matthew, the secret of the company's success is due to the successful working methods that helped establish the very first driving division which have been emulated throughout the rest of the branches.

"This formula certainly worked for us in the early days and judging by the company's growth and expanding branch network, it seems to be as effective as ever."

drivers", 32,000 new drivers need to enter the industry each year. At present less than 22,000 people pass the test.

If demand has increased, why are the numbers entering the industry declining?

One reason may be that since 1997 trainee drivers are now required to take two tests, one for rigid and a second for articulated vehicles. Also, informed sources estimate that the cost of going from a "B" to a "C + E" licence averages around £1,770. For those costs, you really must be dedicated!

The industry has undeniably changed and this has impacted on the job of the HGV driver. But is this for the better? HGV drivers used to consider themselves "kings of the road". Do they these days or has the ethos of the job changed? Has something in the driving culture become less attractive?

Planning is the Key

Our clients are drawn from all areas of industry, ranging from manufacturing through distribution and logistics and driver shortage is currently affecting all sectors, including employment agencies. The Best Connection Group has found that the effects of driver shortage can be minimised when clients plan their requirements in advance and allow us to work with them, after all we also need to plan as accurately as possible if we are to continue providing the "Best" possible service!

DTI – a breath of fresh air, or the cold wind of change?

A High Court hearing, which took place last year, is set to change the long-standing and accepted "modus operandi" associated with using agencies for the provision of temporary drivers.

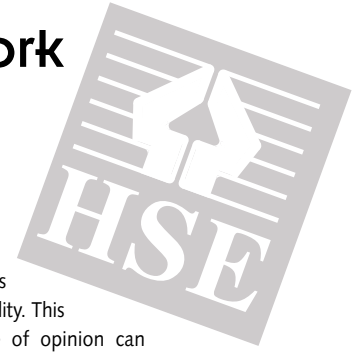
According to some trade press the DTI is about to unleash massive changes that will have a major effect on the relationships between hauliers, agencies and temporary drivers. This is likely to result in an administrative nightmare for the haulier hiring a temporary driver.

Meetings have taken place with DTI, REC, FTA, RHA and DETER to jointly explore alternatives to the current legalities. Temporary driving agencies do provide a very necessary and flexible service to both hauliers and drivers alike; in many cases it is the most cost effective method of running an operation without the need to over-staff. Contrary to popular belief, many hauliers have sought us out, without having to be "sold to".

Despite the prophets of doom, a logical way of operating which is acceptable to all parties will be found and normal service will continue, but then, so much (allegedly) will depend upon the outcome of an appeal to be heard February 2001.

Until then . . . **KEEP ON TRUCKIN'!**

Health & Safety at work



When to Report an Accident

A number of cases have been reported in the press recently where temporary workers provided by agencies (thankfully not TBC) have been involved in accidents whilst based at a client's premises.

In such instances there is often uncertainty surrounding who should report the accident and which procedure should be followed in order to comply with Health and Safety legislation. Such doubts often stem from the fact that the injured person is provided by a third party, namely an agency.

The Best Connection recognises that we have a duty of care towards our workers. As such we believe that whenever a temporary worker sustains a reportable injury whilst based at one of our clients, we should work closely with the client to ensure that both parties are in possession of all facts and that relevant documentation is completed and returned to Health and Safety Executive (HSE), within the specified timescale.

Who should return Form F2508?

For instance, who is responsible for completing and returning form F2508 to report an injury? Some clients feel that the agency is responsible for all dealings with HSE, while many agencies believe that it is

the client's responsibility. This difference of opinion can cause confusion, although avoiding the issue can lead to greater problems for the client later on. We have heard it said by various organisations that HSE does not really mind who reports the accident, **so long as it is reported.**

Client and Agency Responsibility

Both client and agency need to accept that each has a duty of care towards temporary staff so that if one of our temporary workers sustains an industrial injury on client's premises, the client should notify TBC branch of the reportable injury and the relevant branch should immediately pass all available information to Halesowen. We will then liaise directly with the client to decide who should report the incident within the permitted time.

Although TBC has no problem reporting accidents to HSE, very often it can prove far more practical for clients to report the accident themselves.

Rehabilitation of Offenders

This is a topic that branches regularly ask about. It is a very important subject which is too big to cover in detail in this issue, however, we have outlined the salient points for reference purposes.

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act allows an individual who has been convicted of certain offences to treat the conviction as though it had never happened, these are known as "spent convictions".

In general, anyone convicted of an offence and sentenced to thirty months or less may, after a period of time, treat that conviction as though it never took place, provided no further conviction for a serious offence has occurred in the meantime.

This means that an employer may only ask a candidate for employment if they have any "unspent" convictions. An employer may ask if an employee has convictions, but the employee is not obliged to disclose those that are treated as "spent". The Act also makes it

unlawful for an employer to discriminate against an employee, or dismiss them because of a "spent" conviction.

NB Sentences of imprisonment of more than two and a half years can never be spent.

Sentence	Rehabilitation Period
Imprisonment or corrective training for more than six months but less than thirty months	10 years
Cashiering, discharge with ignominy or discharge with disgrace from HM's Service	10 years
Imprisonment for six months or less	7 years
Dismissal from HM's Service	7 years
Detention in respect of a conviction in Service disciplinary Proceedings.	5 years

Listed above is a selection of offences along with their relevant Rehabilitation Periods. For a comprehensive list, including Young Offenders, contact Tony Gabriel.

Three of the best clock up sixty five years experience in employment industry

Three staff at our Leeds branch are celebrating achieving a total of sixty five years combined experience working within the employment industry marketplace.

Together with branch manager Barry MacNay, who has worked in the industry for the past twenty one years, Janet Whittaker also has twenty one years experience and Richard Brown has twenty three years experience.

Throughout their time in the industry, the three, who pride themselves on the 'customers for life' culture that exists within the branch, have made many friends as a result of the long-standing relationships formed with their clients.

Barry MacNay said: "In an industry acknowledged for its poor staff retention, we believe that we are exceptional, having worked together for more than twenty years."

This is due, he feels, to the thorough understanding they have of one another, enabling them to deliver a consistently high level of service to their clients.

"Our clients are also confident that when they contact us they will be able to deal with the same person they dealt with previously," he continued.

The Leeds branch is situated opposite the Millennium Fountain in the city centre and has several specialist divisions including construction, electrical, warehousing and distribution, driving/logistics and food production/manufacturing.

The specialist skills throughout the whole team include an ability to train personnel to a recognised basic food hygiene standard as well as having a trained risk assessor with a clear understanding of Health and Safety issues. In addition, the team is also able to conduct on-site risk assessments.

Pictured below: Janet Whittaker (far left), Barry MacNay (second from right) and Richard Brown (far right), together with the Leeds team.



The Best Connection ventures south

Following the success of our 20 branches throughout the Midlands and the North, we have now ventured South, with the launch of a Crawley operation.

Under the guidance of branch manager, Marcus Jepson, and from premises above Topps Tiles and Wood Flooring in Gatwick Road, the branch will provide temporary personnel for the Industrial, Technical, HGV and Warehouse & Distribution sectors in and around the Crawley area. We see the move South as the first step to offering a national service.

Director of The Best Connection, Neil Yorke, said: "The South East is a very important area for business since there is a significant number of companies in and around Crawley which fit our client profile, and this launch represents an extremely exciting opportunity for the company."

Marcus Jepson's background spans almost 12 years in the recruitment industry, where his responsibilities included business development, account management and corporate sales. Latterly, he was director within a

medium-sized engineering/technical recruitment consultancy based in Manchester.

Marcus Jepson commented: "The Best Connection is the largest independent employment agency in the Midlands specialising in our market and the Crawley branch launch is the start of an expansion programme which we hope will emulate our success in our existing branches, and which may lead to us operating a network of up to 10 branches in the South over the next five or so years.

"I am personally looking forward to the challenge that the move will bring and am confident that if we can apply the same structure to Crawley as throughout the rest of the group then we can replicate this success," he continued.

This success, he says, is based on a combination of factors which include a high standard of quality procedures, motivated team members and an extremely positive approach to business throughout the company.

Convergent helps us 'Ring the Changes'!

With around 70 mobile phones throughout the Group utilising a variety of tariffs and networks including Orange, Vodafone, Cellnet and One2One, managing the mobile phone system has become a bit of a nightmare to say the least!

That was, until detailed research of the options available to us was carried out by Nick Heard. As a result we have negotiated a new deal through Convergent Telecom (formerly JWE), whereby we are working towards transferring all of our mobile phones to the BT Cellnet network using its Business First Tariff.

Since any problems we experience with our mobile phones can create havoc for the Company, the service that we receive from our mobile phone supplier needs to be both speedy and reliable. Fortunately, Convergent fits the bill by responding much more quickly than our previous suppliers, so ensuring that any downtime and inconvenience causes minimal disruption.

The changeover started at the beginning of December 2000 with almost half of the phones being transferred and the remaining units will be changing to Cellnet throughout the New Year, with completion due in September 2001. All numbers will remain the same and mobile phone users will each receive a new handset together with an accessory pack comprising a car charger, leather case and 'walk 'n talk' kit.

Here's to a headache-free mobile phone system!

Customer Services Feedback **CRAWLEY**

In a recent Crawley branch customer services survey, 75% of respondents reported that the service provided by the branch has been 'excellent'.

One client commented that the launch of The Best Connection within the Crawley area has been 'like a breath of fresh air' and another said that the new operation had saved him from doing 'something nasty' to his previous supplier!

Well done Crawley and keep up the good work!

Staff Training: Investing in our future

The Best Connection Group has always regarded staff training and development as an essential factor in the growth of the Group.

The degree to which TBC's commitment to staff training has paid off is evident from the number of "home grown" staff that are now involved in running TBC branches.

Last year around 200 training places were made available to staff at all levels including administrative, consultant, managerial and I.T.

To illustrate our on-going commitment we already have around 200 placements booked for the first half of the year, covering the whole spectrum of skills, not only for the development of existing staff, but also for new entrants joining the company or coming into the industry for the first time.

Join in the celebrations

The coming year is a very special one for us since we will be celebrating our 10th anniversary.

The Best Connection has changed enormously during that time and we are proud to have achieved a network of 21 branches thanks to a great team of people. Without your hard work and dedication this would not have been possible.

In recognition of this, we would like to invite you and your partner to join us at our 10th anniversary party as we celebrate the past ten years and look forward to continued success.

The party takes place at the Botanical Gardens on Saturday 31st March 2001 and we will be sending you more details soon. In the meantime, please make a note of the date, because we really would like everyone to be there.



Competition Corner



Why not take up the challenge and enter this competition? All you have to do is find the **one word** anagram using **all** 13 letters below. With five S's and four E's in one word, it might not be quite as easy as it sounds.

L L P N S S S S S E E E E

My answer to the anagram competition is:

Name

Position

Organisation

Telephone No.

The first two correct entries drawn at our 10th Birthday Party will each receive **£10.00 Gift Vouchers**.

Please post, fax or e-mail your completed entry to:

Tony Gabriel • The Best Connection Group Ltd
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THE EDITOR'S DECISION WILL BE FINAL.

Where to find us

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Bradford	01274 747500	01274 747555
Burton	01283 545333	01283 545075
Chesterfield	01246 209222	01246 206333
Coventry	024 76 228040	024 76 228042
Crawley	01293 515333	01293 516333
Dudley	01384 230003	01384 239691
Halesowen	0121 504 3000	0121 504 3009
Hull	01482 610 160	01482 610 686
Leeds	0113 243 1033	0113 243 0951
Leicester	0116 251 2363	0116 251 2364
Manchester	0161 237 9333	0161 237 9444
Nottingham	0115 958 5880	0115 958 5884
Preston	01772 201777	01772 201888
Redditch	01527 591141	01527 591142
Stoke	01782 209666	01782 209777
Tamworth	01827 533333	01827 53090
Walsall	01922 639000	01922 636500
Warrington	01925 629666	01925 629777
Wolverhampton	01902 773000	01902 773001
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STOP PRESS!

The next edition of Best News will feature:

- New TNT UK Development Manager •
- Manchester Branch • Redditch Branch •
- New and Expectant Mothers at Work •

Best News

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