

Investing to succeed

Last month, theCOACHHOLIDAY.com re-branded itself as Just Go! Holidays. It's a bold step and one that the industry will be watching closely. In this exclusive report, Stuart Render headed to 'Lake Garda' to witness the birth



Star of the show. One of two coaches belonging to Johnson Bros Tours of Workso

There was an audible gasp as the curtains drew back. This wasn't what the guests had been expecting. After all, coach tourism functions are reasonably predictable. But then again, it's not every day theCOACHHOLIDAY.com rebrands itself.

But first, and to make life easier for this author, let's get the terminology out of the way. The new name for theCOACHHOLIDAY.com company is Just Go! Holidays – with the exclamation mark. For the sake of brevity, I'm going to call the company Just Go.

Back to the function. Just Go is based in Cheltenham so the town's famous racecourse seemed a perfectly sensible place to host an event that linked to another kind of horse power.

More than 360 guests, representing coach operators and suppliers, had been invited to what was, first and foremost, the company's second annual awards night. In a nice touch, and one which exemplified the care that had gone in to organising the event, tables were identified, not by table numbers, but by destinations from the Just Go holiday programme. I spent the evening on 'Lake Garda'.

Mike Merron, the company's founder, took to the stage, pointing out that this year, and for the first time, the guest list included many long time customers. He then told guests that the awards presentation would be happening, but first there was some other business.

Chairman and CEO, Luis Arteaga reminded guests that coach travel is not only socially



Partnership promotes coach holidays

bonding and environmentally friendly, but also easy, simple and safe to use. He was talking to the converted of course, but in talking up the benefits of coach touring not only was he setting the scene for what was about to happen, but he was also demonstrating a commitment to supporting this industry. He pointed out that the coachholiday.com name was well liked, but not that well known, and not that easily remembered in a crowded market place.

"It was time to change," he said. "People are not going to give up getting away. They work hard and feel they deserve a break, and we want to make that as easy and enjoyable as we can. Our new brand is a call to action."

Then it was time for what we were all expecting. To the background music of Lionel Richie's 'Just Go', up came the new Just Go logo on the big screen, and two members of

staff appeared wearing the new blue and yellow uniform.

But wait, what was this? Dry ice and smoke billowed from behind the black drapes on either side of the stage, drapes that until that point in the evening we hadn't given much thought to. Suddenly, as the music reached its peak, the drapes pulled back to reveal two full size coaches carrying the new Just Go livery.

It was such a surprise, and so well done, that the room suddenly erupted with applause. One-coach reveals are not uncommon, but a two-coach reveal was most impressive.

But that wasn't the end of it. Luis then announced a new partnership with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

"We're going to offer holidays by coach to the 1.1 million members of the RSPB," he explained. "On those holidays we're going to visit a couple of RSPB nature reserves as well as places of cultural and historical interest. This partnership will make it easier for RSPB members to get out and about, as well as connecting people with nature. It's also another way to get a new audience interested in coach touring."

Bryan Bland, the RSPB's Public Relations Manager, told guests that his organisation has the destinations, and an audience of warm supporters. In talking with Just Go he had realised that the company has the proven infrastructure, the industry know how, and a loyal customer base.

"The new brand, with its call to action, makes this a very exciting partnership," he said.

But behind all the gloss and the glitz, what's really changed?

Luis Arteaga told *Coach Monthly* that the new branding uses yellow which he hopes will become associated with Just Go in the same way that orange has become associated with a certain low-cost airline.

"Yellow features heavily on everything, from our new coach livery through to staff uniforms and across our marketing," he said. "We've used a designer from outside the industry to give us a new image that's fresh and exciting."

In its re-branded form, Just Go will continue to focus solely on providing coach holidays.

"We are 100% dedicated to coach holidays and to the coach industry," said Luis. "I want Just Go to be at the forefront in offering value for money breaks, and to play a positive role in encouraging more people to take a coach holiday. I also want Just Go to be the nation's favourite provider of breaks."

In 2008 the company carried 57,000 passengers. In 2009 that figure rose to 125,000 and last year the figure topped 200,000.

It was good to see so many coach tour drivers at the Cheltenham event. Just Go contracts coaches in from a core of around 30 operators. The next morning, around 100 drivers and managers from those operators gathered for a briefing on how the new brand would affect them.

James Massey, Just Go's enthusiastic Director of Marketing (and together with his colleague Maddy Phillips, the main organisers of the launch event) pointed out that the new brand



Operations Director Paul Mason (centre) with members of Just Go's operations team

would make the drivers and their vehicles more visible.

"Everyone will be watching us so it's more important than ever before to deliver the best service to our customers," he explained. "You are the most important person. You can make or break a tour."

James was joined by Just Go's Operations Director, Paul Mason who, together with members of the operations team, then handed out the new uniforms, branded document bags, tour information packs and a new safety CD.

A key element in monitoring driver quality is the feedback form.

"Our customers complete them and post them back to us directly," said James Massey. "We prepare a monthly report which is then sent out to our operators."

Just Go also runs a series of training academies across the country for drivers of contracted operators. Demonstrating the way that the company is investing in the industry, the sessions incorporate Driver CPC training for any tour driver who hasn't already completed the course.

"I'm proud of the relationships we have with operators," says Luis Arteaga. "We're investing heavily in making sure that we can all deliver an excellent service to the customer. I believe we're a great partner to work with. I also believe that not only are we all in this together, but that we're also in it for the long term. That's good for us commercially of course, but it's also got to be good for the industry."

But at the heart of all of this, it's the relationship at the sharp end that matters.

David Perry, Managing Director of Malton-based Perry's British and Continental Travel, told *Coach Monthly* that the launch event had been spectacular.

"They really know how to put on a show," he said. "We've worked with them for more than a year, and have just had two of our fleet put into the new livery. The day to day relationship with their team is excellent. In these difficult economic times it's good to see them investing in the industry and keeping operators in touch with what they're doing. It was also a special night for us with one of our drivers, Mark Adams,



Yellow features heavily, from the coach livery, through to staff uniforms and marketing



More than 100 drivers and managers gathered for the Sunday morning briefing

receiving the award for Driver of the Year." Julie and Gary Herbert of Ramsgate-based Carol Peters Travel said that they were very pleased to be working with Just Go.

"We had a wonderful evening, and it was good to be able to talk with other operators," says Julie. "Just Go has a fantastic operations team and we enjoy working with them. It feels great to be working with such an inspiring and enthusiastic company and we look forward to a

long and successful working relationship."

Luis Arteaga talks of taking a million passengers a year on coach holidays by 2014. Optimistic? Perhaps. But what isn't in doubt is Just Go's commitment to the industry, and its desire to grow by delivering a quality product.

● Full details of all the winners of the Just Go awards can be found in the news pages of this issue.