

Digitalising the retail market sector by the market people.

Communication and the ability to convey ideas, share knowledge, and propagate opinions are the cornerstones of human evolution. Digital transformation is about connectivity, often misunderstood as the digital presence or digitisation of analogue processes. Twelve years ago, some in the industry perceived digitalisation and internet sales as threats to traditional methods.

However, today, it is evident that digitalisation offers far more than just e-commerce.

Our background

Our initial engagement with the industry as a market operator involved organising speciality markets as events. Each week, we hosted one or two markets of varying sizes, accommodating 30 to 150 traders, with approximately 70% hailing from overseas, spread across different locations in the UK.

Each market presented unique challenges, influenced by factors such as location, applicable legislation, and the interests of local stakeholders. Over the years, we engaged with over 200 local authorities, navigating diverse administrative procedures and complying with various regulations.

Acting as informal liaisons between traders and local authority services, including licensing, trading standards, environmental health, public safety, fire brigade, highway, public transport, police, park management, planning, and English heritage, among others, became part of our daily schedule.

The year 2009 marked a significant turning point for us. Like many businesses, we felt the impact of the economic downturn, which caused several long-term traders to leave, unable to weather the economic challenges. Subsequent local authorities' budget cuts led to price hikes and reductions in services,

These circumstances heightened our administrative costs, which we could not transfer to struggling traders. We needed to streamline our administrative workload to ensure our survival.

A review of our administrative process revealed that we spent 20% of our time trying to connect with the correct department and 30% monitoring the trader's operation and documentation in compliance with local authorities' requirements. Which was due to two factors:

- The number of applications and traders' details we had to process and provide to local authorities every week
- The documentation required from one local authority to another was inconsistent, varying from very little to sometimes overly extensive. For example, providing proof that a professional Gas Safety Check was conducted every time a gas bottle was reconnected.

We concluded that going digital was the only way to communicate the information to the traders and ensure they provided the correct documentation.

Six months later, we launched our inaugural website, enabling traders to conveniently submit applications to our markets online. Achieving this milestone within a 26K budget was a significant feat. The streamlined process facilitated easy documentation verification, leading to a notable uptick in successful application submissions.

This early success encouraged us also to digitalise licensing application processes, booking and payment, presuming that it will be as straightforward as adding a merchant and checkout software to our website. However, we encountered a major obstacle – the absence of suitable payment or checkout software (CMS) available for our needs. Consequently, we had to embark on developing a bespoke solution, underestimating the endeavour's complexity.

After investing an additional 40K and making minimal progress, it became evident that our small business lacked the resources to justify such a substantial investment. To make the venture financially viable, we realised the need to develop a system that other companies could use to offset the costs. Thus, the concept of a digital platform akin to booking.com but tailored to facilitates access to working opportunities for traders began to take shape.

As we deliberated on this idea, its potential impact on the industry became increasingly apparent. Realising the project's complexity, securing an investor became imperative. In 2011, we found an ideal partner in Imriel, a digital solutions provider boasting a team of over 200 developers. While their direct financial contribution was minimal, Imriel committed to assigning five developers to our project free of charge for as long as necessary.

In early 2012, market People LTD was formed, and our digital journey started.

Our Journey

We embarked on our project with a clear goal, understanding its scope and engaging with stakeholders. Our approach was inherently user-centric, drawing inspiration from the government's guidelines after the NHS IT failure. Aligning with governmental priorities, our company policies and platform's architecture prioritised data security (even pre-GDPR), non-discriminatory procedures, cross-service communication, transparency, accountability, efficiency, standardisation, integrability, user satisfaction, cost-effectiveness, and the prevention of digital exclusion.

These standards also guided our technology selection. We opted for cloud-based solutions for accessibility, Java for seamless integration with government systems, Oracle for robust development monitoring, and AWS for hosting reliability. Despite being a small company, we aimed to deliver a digital solution that met and exceeded governmental recommendations. Leveraging our market operating company, we piloted the system live, ensuring real-world testing and refinement. We were proud to check all the requisite boxes.

Nevertheless, securing investors remained paramount for implementing our digital solution. While we garnered considerable interest, potential investors recurrently expressed concern about our system's requirement for public sector approval. To mitigate this concern, we aimed to collaborate with only a few local authorities to conduct a pilot program.

Understanding the importance of leveraging established channels for service promotion, we recognised that options were limited in the retail market. The essential vehicles available included the NABMA, the NMTF, the AoLM, and, most recently, the LMB. During the first three years, despite NABMA's commitment to help, we were unable to secure any local authorities to run a pilot.

Efforts to engage with the NMTF unfortunately went unanswered. Seeking broader support, we contacted government departments, including the DCLG, BIS and MPs, to be redirected to organisations we have already contacted. Demonstrations were conducted whenever there was interest.

We extended a complimentary service, compiling listings of all London Markets and allowing local authorities to claim and manage their listings. However, regrettably, our outreach yielded no responses. Despite this, feedback on our system remained positive, with no criticisms regarding its quality. Reasons for the low adoption varied, from being ahead of the curve in the market industry to hints of potential political factors, although without additional elaboration.

Imriel withdrew from the project in 2016. Despite this setback, the project's owner continued its development and support using private funds. Over the past 12 years, we have allocated over a million pounds solely to developing the Market People platform, excluding hosting, operational costs, and research and testing. Notably, we have never received subsidies, public funding, or assistance.

Understanding the industry and the different stakeholders

To appreciate the potential and benefits the platform provides to the retail market sector, it is essential to take a holistic approach to understand the industry, the consumers, the traders, and the causes and effects of the key elements influencing the sector.

Industry Landscape:

- Legally and administratively, markets are not recognised as commercial entities. Most markets operate under a commercial asset management framework.
- In the UK, local authorities operate or oversee approximately 84% of markets. This unique setup places the sector squarely under the direct influence of local politics.
- The industry's landscape is fragmented, driven by competition, historical monopolies in local areas, communication gaps between local authorities, and disparate stakeholder priorities.
- Before 2020, the sector's slow decline was often regarded as a local issue caused by external commercial factors. However, the onset of COVID-19 elevated it to a national concern, underscoring the urgent need for improved communication and a unified approach to addressing industry challenges.
- The industry is witnessing a significant exodus of traders, with some estimates suggesting a reduction of up to 70% in the past 12 years.
- The industry recognises the dearth of management skills impacting the sector, local authorities are increasingly concerned about their understanding of traders and their issues. Addressing these concerns ranks high on the agenda of initiatives like NABMA's market-first program.
- Taking into consideration the budget cuts affecting the public sector, the number of markets operating at a loss, and the industry's decline, it is risky for unitary Local Authorities to invest in the management of their markets.

This scenario exacerbates the polarised relationship between traders and operators, posing a dilemma for local authorities: how to strike a balance between empowering employees, such as Market Managers, to deliver optimal service to traders and maintaining control and accountability within hierarchical organisational structures.

From the public perspective:

- The public regards the market as a commercial entity; the name, trading hours, and image all refer to the market as the commercial entity, not the individual traders.
- The most popular and successful markets have a solid individual identity based on various factors, such as history or offering.
- The public evaluates markets based on five key criteria: price, product variety, quality, atmosphere, and personal interaction.
- Positive and negative experiences will generally be associated with the market as opposed to any individual trader.
- Its market's public image influences a town's reputation, and conversely.

Understanding local authorities

Local authorities play a vital role in maintaining public order, managing public assets, and delivering services to their communities. Within this framework, market management serves two key purposes: maximising revenue from public assets and providing socio-commercial spaces for the community.

- **Priorities**
Because of the wide range of responsibilities held by local authorities and the size of their communities, markets may not always receive high priority on their agenda.
- **Management**
In the past, the old "toby" served as the intermediary between local authorities and traders. However, since the nineties, local authorities have sought greater transparency and reduced the perceived closeness between themselves and traders. This shift towards a more arms-length approach focused on asset administration has inadvertently created a communication gap, disrupting the relationship between traders and their "landlords". Consequently, policies have increasingly prioritised monitoring and controlling traders' activities, often neglecting the market's commercial performance.
- **Data and Decision-Making:**
Local authorities and bodies rely on solid, accurate data to justify their actions. Unfortunately, the industry is affected by data scarcity, with no information or data analysis on the markets commercial performance. This reinforces the asset management-centric approach adopted by local authorities.
- **Risk Mitigation:**
Local authorities are responsible for safeguarding public investments to mitigate the risk of investing in the market from an estate asset management point of view. To protect their investments, Local Authorities can use market rights that allow them to enforce controversial monopoly status, creating an artificial economic environment.
- **Operational Challenges:**
The legislation assumes that local authorities solely operate street markets, facilitating the monitoring and enforcing regulations surrounding the traders' activities. However, from an asset management perspective, private operators do not have the same legal obligation or authority to enforce the legislation. Making it more challenging for trading standards, EHO, and SAG to monitor traders attending privately operated markets as opposed to council-led markets.
- **Marketing**
Competition law hinders local authorities' ability to use public funding to promote their markets and market traders' commercial activities.

Understanding the traders

Six key points need to be considered to understand the traders better:

- **Administrative Burden:**
Market traders prioritise productivity and sales over paperwork. Small businesses are directly affected by the efficiency of public services as compliance with administrative tasks poses an unrecoverable cost for them. Any policies that create unnecessary friction to trading are perceived as an excessive burden.
- **Quality of life considerations:**
Market traders approach pitch selection similarly to job seekers. Traders evaluate factors like the commercial potential, customer demographic, marketing, trading hours, and facilities such as vehicular access, car parking, waste disposal, access to water, electricity, stallage, storage, and toilets. Everything that may affect or improve their working conditions.
- **Flexibility:**
The need for flexibility varies depending on the type of commodity sold and can be far more important for street markets than other retail spaces. The difficulty of retaining and attracting specialist commodities can often be due to a lack of flexibility. For some trader casual trading is a necessity.
For example, traders holding perishable stock may need to find additional trading opportunities instantly and require multiple stalls to ensure turnover and avoid wastage, while traders selling “one-time purchase” goods benefit from being able to relocate frequently. Flexibility and seamless access to trading opportunities are essential to some businesses sustainability and therefore, preserving the diversity of commodities on offer.
- **Marketing:**
Limited resources and lack of applicable skills can hinder individual market traders' promotional efforts. Traders view the market primarily as a commercial entity but seldom integrate it into their business promotion efforts. They consider themselves as "the business," often delegating marketing responsibilities to operators despite directly benefiting from it. When selecting a market, traders consider the effectiveness of these marketing efforts. As a result, Successful marketing campaigns targeting the public have a direct impact on trader applications, leading to increased interest and participation.
- **Pricing Impact:**
Pitch fees constitute a small portion of operating costs for traders. Instead, easing fixed and operational costs and facilitating decent turnover opportunities are critical for the sustainability of their businesses
- **Group discipline**
Experienced and professional market traders appreciate a well-policed market. They recognise that without clear and fair leadership, the lack of group discipline can be detrimental to the market.

Conclusion:

In summary, while Street markets are widely acknowledged as commercial entities, many lack Leadership, leading to neglect of traders' needs and misaligned management approaches.

Successful markets thrive on a robust commercial identity, emphasising trader understanding, marketing investment, and commercially oriented management. To entice new traders, it is crucial to portray trading as an appealing career path. Achieving this requires a candid assessment of their work environment and the potential for earning a reasonable and respectable income. Addressing ownership responsibilities and adopting a more business-driven approach to management is crucial for sustainable growth. Collaboration between local authorities and stakeholders, improved communication, data-driven decision-making, and balancing regulation with commercial interests are vital for nurturing thriving markets. Adapting to market dynamics and embracing innovation can empower local authorities to rejuvenate and sustain vibrant marketplaces for their communities.

Choosing the right digital solution in the public sector environment.

Digital transformation has become a focal point for large organisations, prompting even traditionally resistant entities to venture into uncharted territory. Local authorities harbour a risk-averse culture essential for preserving governance stability and safeguarding against public scrutiny.

Digitalisation is both innovative and disruptive. It is uncommon for governments to interact with nascent business sectors and proactively address risks and disruptions instead of merely avoiding them.

According to Deloitte and Forbes, the statistics are alarming. The digital failure rate for large organisations is 95%, for medium and small businesses 43%, and for micro-businesses only 12%.

Failures can occur at any stage, regardless of project size or complexity, and bespoke development often exacerbates risks. Accurately budgeting for digital projects is challenging, especially when tenders require precise specifications to stay within strict budgets

However, accommodating changes and modifications is essential for project success and quality as flexibility, user adoption, and testing results are crucial. In essence, modifications are inevitable in digital projects, making adaptability a key factor for success and exposing the government and related entities' vulnerability when engaging with innovative projects.

Still, personalisation is attractive when making long-lasting and disruptive changes; looking for the best solutions that will do exactly what you need is natural. However, the associated risks are substantial:

- Performance forecasting is almost impossible to do until the product is developed. The efficiency of a system can only be assessed once development costs have been met.
- Regardless of how good any given isolated system is, it will always lack the ability to grow outside of the immediate network, hampering its potential.
- Initial development costs are only the start. The evolution rate of the digital industry is higher than in any other sector. The lifespan of a bespoke digital system is related to its adaptability and capacity to upgrade and update.
- Implementation, staff training, maintenance, bespoke system upgrades, and data hosting must be considered when estimating a new system's ROI.
- User acceptance period: It is standard to ensure the system functions as intended when users follow instructions. However, anticipating and averting potential user errors in all scenarios is challenging. A robust customer support team and proactive developers are essential to mitigate the risk of complaints.

The central government now recommends starting with off-the-shelf or cloud-based solutions. If an exact model is unavailable, contacting the developer to inquire about modifications can be more cost-effective than building a system from scratch. This approach reduces the risk of failures, budget overruns, or a system that provides minimal benefits.

In our industry, the choices are limited. Local authorities and market operators' websites do not allow traders to apply, book, and pay for their pitches online because the website builder software's CMS (Wiz, word press, etc.) is not adapted to industry-specific requirements, which means that there are no cheap options available. Any bespoke digital system intended to allow the processing of traders' applications will require full-stack development.

The Market People digital solution specs and components

The Market People digital solution addresses the challenges inherent in the fragmented and diverse market sector. To ensure success and accommodate varying operator management models, varying legislation and trader needs while providing the traders with a consistent and straightforward process, the following priorities have been adopted

Connectivity, time proof, adaptability, and compatibility

We have addressed user experience, connectivity, and durability issues by opting for a platform as a digital solution. Using Java ensures compatibility with government systems, and our architecture allows multiple terminal types to be added.

User-centricity

The user experience is crucial to any digital solution. As market traders are the industry's most crucial element, and the sector's revival hinges on their success, prioritising their users' experience was natural. To this intention services and features provided include:

- One-stop shops and standardisation of all administrative procedures accessible from any device.
- Search and filter facility to find suitable trading opportunities.
- Reduce the application process time from the statutory 28 days to 24 hours.
- Ability to process bookings over the phone. To avoid digital exclusion, provide access to those with limited digital experience and literacy skills.
- Intuitive user interface for traders.
- Improving operator performance, monitoring traders, and enhancing public service efficiency

Legislation compliance

The legislation regulating the industry is old and has not been adapted to digital transformation. We must accept that it may not change soon. In some circumstances, applying the legislation to the letter is impossible. As a third party, we could not take the liberty to interpret the legislation as Local authorities may do. In these cases, we took the same pragmatic approach. For example, many authorities do not ask the trader to provide two photos signed on the back as per legislation, as it is irrelevant in a modern context, but may ask for more modern proof of ID.

We have ensured compliance with all regulations governing market trading and businesses. Any additional documentation determined by local legislation can be implemented on a case-by-case basis.

Data Security

Data security is paramount for any cloud-based digital solution provider, and minimising access points while utilising secure server providers is key to preventing breaches. Most databases are encrypted and automatically backed up to enhance security. It is crucial to note that 99% of data breaches occur through account holder access, making it imperative to restrict access to only necessary data for each user's duties. To achieve this, we have implemented several measures:

1 Civil Service Terminals: Each officer is assigned a personal account with access limited to the political boundary of their jurisdiction. For example, officers in the environmental health department can access data on food traders and their inspection history but not information on non-food traders. A trading standard officer will have access to every trader's data but not to information related to food inspection.

2: Operator's Multi-User Accounts: Market operator accounts include sub-accounts and terminals with varying access levels. The account holder can customize permissions, enabling granular allocation of data and privileges. Each staff member's account can be tailored to their specific job role, either through pre-set options or on a bespoke basis.

3: Protection of traders' personal details:

To enhance data protection and streamline the licensing process for market traders, we introduced the "market pass," which consists of a three-tiered registration system:

Tier 1: Traders' Personal Details (Subject to GDPR):

Includes name, surname, personal address, phone number, date and place of birth, proof of address, proof of ID, national insurance number, and public liability insurance (PLI).

Details are centrally verified and shared with relevant stakeholders upon written request, except for name, surname, and photo.

Tier 2: Business Details (Not Subject to GDPR):

Covers business name, address, registration (for limited companies), business contact details, public liability insurance, business type (e.g., artisan, wholesaler), and business description.

Automatically shared with market operators and relevant local authority departments.

Tier 3: Stall and Product Details (Not Subject to GDPR):

Includes stall type and size, stall photo and description, appliances and equipment used (e.g., gas and electric), commodity type and description, and specific requirements (e.g., electricity, water supply).

This information generates a list of compulsory documents for traders, such as a personal food hygiene certificate for traders selling hot food, stall rating stars, and local authority registration details for food businesses.

Facilitating efficient application processing for operators and accurate trader activity monitoring for local authorities.

The Market Pass

Issuing a card to identify market traders or non-sedentary businesses is not new and is a legal requirement in many EU countries. For instance, in France, it is known as the "carte de commerce non-sedentary," and in Germany, it is called the "Reisegewerbekarte." This card aims to simplify administrative procedures for traders applying for pitches and verify the holder's legitimacy, like a personal licence to sell alcohol in the UK.

What is innovative is the inclusion of details required in tier 3 of the registration process, as described above. These are necessary for the digital licence application process and to facilitate the monitoring of trader's activities. While the market pass is integral to our system and needs to be issued and processed centrally for security reasons, we believe that to ensure the continuity and scrutiny of this service, it should be managed by a government organisation.

However, there are potential alternatives. For example, the market pass could be temporarily issued by us for a set period, during which traders would need to present themselves to a local authority officer with proof of ID and address. The officer could then validate the market pass through a designated terminal. Please note that information provided in tiers 2 and 3 does not need to be validated as Local Authorities officers and market operators always have access to these "non-sensitive" data.

Or the platform could be linked to the government's digital ID program.

The entity responsible for issuing the market pass is subject to discussion. The primary focus is maintaining the data's security.

Market Pass functionalities

Market pass suspension:

While the market pass validity is set (one year), the market pass is automatically suspended when public liability has expired. Forbidding the user to submit further applications or confirm a booking until the correct document has been provided and verified. Existing confirmed bookings are not affected, but the relevant market operator is informed that the document has expired and can take the necessary action.

A market pass can also be suspended at the request of an environmental health officer and after investigation when, for example, a trader has not stated on his registration that he is selling food or has bought a new gas appliance without a proper certificate.

Changing and updating other parameters:

A trader may change their activity from non-food to food, have a new stall, or have new appliances (gas or electric). When the trader changes these parameters, they need to upload the necessary related documentation. Some documents are compulsory, and failing to provide them will result in their market pass being suspended until these documents are provided and verified.

Other documents expiry date:

The validity of some documents differs from one operator to another. For gas certificates, for example, sometimes the operator demands that every appliance be tested after setting up, and others will accept the manufacturer certificate if it is less than 2 years old. The market pass is not automatically suspended when the date on that document expires. However, the operators are warned when the date has expired and can verify the document to make the relevant decision. For example, food hygiene certificates may have a recommended renewal date, but this date is only a recommendation, as a certificate is valid for a lifetime.

The platform architecture and stakeholders' terminals

The platform's architecture consists of a central encrypted database that stores two types of data: system data and user data. Access to the user's data and data collection are provided through various terminals. Each terminal is associated with a user type, and data access to each terminal is restricted according to:

- The user's type needs,
- The legislation,
- The regulatory and mandatory procedure,
- Data privacy.

Each terminal includes tools and functionalities specifically designed to improve the user's performance in carrying out daily activities and duties.

The Local authorities' terminals

The civil service or local authorities' accounts have been designed to improve administrative efficiency, monitor trading activities and communication across departments and jurisdictions.

The difference between each department's terminals is mainly the data individuals can access and some minor changes in functionalities to accommodate the various administrative needs. The functionalities provided and data access are determined by the information provided during the officer registration:

- The civil servant department: licensing, market rights, trading standard, environmental health, public safety, highway, planning, transport, etc.
- The civil servant jurisdiction (We have listed and mapped every Unitary Local Authorities boundary in the UK)
- The civil servant position.
- The legislation applied (for licensing): LLAA 1990, the Food Act, 1982 or the LGMPA 1982

This ensures instant and precise delivery of data to the intended recipient. For instance, the system identifies the appropriate local authority depending on the market or event location. For example, suppose a market or event is held on public land in London and governed by LLAA legislation. In that case, the system identifies the correct local authority and provides the traders with the ability to apply for a street trading licence and the tools and information for licensing officers to be able to issue the licence.

The functionalities and tools provided to the officers differ from one terminal to another. For example, licensing can verify the documentation provided, process licences, and check the licensing status of a trader or the trader's assistant when carrying out an inspection. The EHO can write a report and access report history and details from other local authorities' EHOs.

These terminals are not yet tested in the live environment, and while the officers may find the tools and functionality currently provided to be useful, these terminals are bound to improve once we can run as we gather the user's feedback.

For example, the current inspector report is a free text, but it could be a pre-set questionnaire or a form with tick boxes or ratings to ensure continuity.

Creating a digital form will not be difficult, but finalising its content requires agreement and confirmation from the EH's department. The system could even deliver an automated report and rating according to the questionnaire results. With the local authorities' engagement, many tools and functionalities could be added to the civil servant's terminal to improve efficiency and consistency.

The trader's terminal.

The trader terminal can be accessed from any device through the platform or the operator's website(s) when the I frame has been implemented. This terminal allows the traders to perform several tasks. However, the extent of the service provided is dictated by the type of terminal the operator is using and the Local authority's engagement; please see the operator and public service terminals section of this document.

Service provided

When the operator implements the standard terminal:

- To search for trading opportunities.
- To access detailed information about each market, event or single pitch and the relevant terms and conditions.
- To submit a permanent or casual trader's application providing all the documents and information operators may require simultaneously.
- To add an assistant or another registered trader as an assistant to their application.
- To create multiple stalls.
- To manage their applications across multiple markets.
- To advertise their business, stall and the service or product they offer.
- To create and advertise daily or special offers.
- For their stall to be automatically included in the daily list of stalls attending a market or event once the operator has approved their booking.

When the operator implements the professional terminal, additional services are provided:

- Access the daily availability of pitches, the sizes and descriptions of the pitches available, the commodities permitted, and the relevant terms and conditions.
- View the daily price for each pitch, which depends on its trading status (permanent, casual, regular), relevant special offers, or agreement with a particular operator.
- Apply, confirm attendance and pay, either online or over the phone.
- Be informed when payment is due or overdue.

When a local authority uses the civil service terminal, additional services are provided

- The documentation and information required are automatically sent to the relevant department. (Trading standards, environmental health, licensing...)
- The trader can access their business's report and inspection history.
- The traders can be informed when their activities may be affected by local regulations, administrative procedures, or external events.

System features related to the trader's terminal:

- A stall cannot be double booked.
- When a trader wants to move on, he can start looking and submitting applications while continuing trading but cannot confirm a single stall's booking without cancelling existing bookings first.
- A trader can have three pending applications per stall and simultaneously for a specific date. Once one application is successful and confirmed, the other cannot be confirmed. However, a trader may have multiple stalls applying for separate events if they wish.
- When a trader gets on the operator's waiting list, this is not considered a pending application but rather a show of interest until contacted by the operator.

The operator's terminals.

The operator's terminal came in three versions: simplified, professional, and bespoke, to fit everyone's needs.

The simplified version:

This version allows operators to advertise their market or event to the public and the traders.

This terminal is perfect for one-off events, small businesses, or marketing. It has all the advertising features provided in other operator's terminals; the operator can receive applications of traders' interest, which includes all the trader details and documentation necessary to process an application manually.

Stall attendance can be approved or confirmed and recorded through the system; the stall will be added to the daily list of attending stalls and displayed to the public and the civil services terminals.

The professional version

This version enables a seamless digital application process, from submission to payment upon booking confirmation. It facilitates managing trader attendance, daily availability, and monitoring staff performance.

The operator's account includes seven sub-terminals. The main terminal gives full access to the owner's account and control over the other six terminals with related access levels to the owner's account:

- The associate's terminal, which gives full access.
- The general manager terminal can fully operate the account but cannot configure the account settings such as payment policy, terms and conditions and payment gateway.
- The market or site managers terminal whose access is limited to the sites, events, or market they are managing.
- The account or receipt officer terminal who can process payment, but not the booking application and other administrative tasks.
- The site officer's terminal only has access to data related to the operation of the site (not the administration or application processing)
- The marketing officer's terminal can only access marketing-related data.

The account is highly adaptable, accommodating various application processes, payment policies, and business models without requiring programming expertise. Configuration parameters allow the operator's general or specific trading terms and conditions and restrictions attached to a market, pitch, or commodity to be generated automatically when a trader applies. This and the daily availability prevent the submission and processing of unnecessary applications. Setting these parameters is as simple as filling out a questionnaire or a form. Operators can adjust or modify the account anytime without developer intervention, offering flexibility to address business needs promptly and implement decisions instantly at no additional cost.

This version offers additional features, including the capability to process bookings and payments via phone for instant communication with traders. It allows for managing trader accounts, handling overdue payments, and displaying daily occupancy through an interactive layout. Moreover, it facilitates the direct transfer of legal documentation to relevant public services, such as licences, risk assessments, management plans, method statements, etc.

Most configurations have been thoroughly tested in a live environment. Additionally, a dummy account is available on our User Acceptance Testing (UAT) platform, which allows configurations to be tested before being implemented live.

The bespoke version:

The bespoke version offers customisation ranging from minor cosmetic adjustments to advanced features like integrating with existing booking systems, adding staff rota and salary software, or connecting to accounting software. The only limitations are the operator's budget and timeframe. However, we strongly encourage operators, especially those new to digitalisation, to explore existing versions before opting for bespoke solutions whenever feasible

The public terminal

The public terminal is what everyone can see when visiting the platform or the operator's website without identification being required giving them access to public information from registered markets or traders. This can include the list of stalls attending a market or where a stall is trading on specific days. Additional services are also provided after completing simple registration:

- The ability to rate and follow a trader or a market.
- To access the operator and traders' business details they have made available to the public
- To select their favourite market and trader to be informed of what is happening, when there is an event or a special offer, or follow a trader's whereabouts.
- To send a message to a trader (following a purchase, for example).

Marketing and promotion

Operators and traders account includes digital and non-digital marketing tools

- **Iframe**
Using the IFrame's code provided enables operators to seamlessly integrate and showcase their listings and related features on their own websites. This facilitates public access and allows traders to view information and submit applications directly from the operator's website.
- **"What's on" and campaigns**
This feature empowers market operators to craft marketing campaigns and promotions tailored to both the public and traders. When targeting the public, operators can solicit trader commitments. For instance, if an operator plans a "bargain day at the market," both the public and traders receive notifications. Traders can showcase special discounts they will offer on that day. Similarly, for themed events like a Medieval day, operators can include requirements like traders wearing medieval costumes in their terms and conditions for the day. This feature can also be used to notify participation in National campaigns.
- **Social media:**
With each listing and publication, a social media link is generated, simplifying event and special offer promotion. Clicking on the social media icons automatically creates and publishes posts on the user's social media account.
- **QR code and boards**
Traders are equipped with essential tools to design and print a stall board, featuring a QR code linked to their details on the platform. This enables visitors and customers to easily connect with the trader, enhancing engagement and fostering relationships.
- **Proximity beacons.**
Proximity beacons can be configured to connect directly with market listings, providing the public with real-time information about the market, individual traders, and current events happening at the marketplace.
- **Notifications**
Members of the public and traders can set-up their account to receive notification according to their interest. For example, when a new listing, a trader's promotion or attendance is published on the platform.

The platform's benefits.

We can break the benefits The Market People delivers into two main categories: the benefits provided to the various stakeholders and the benefits provided to the industry.

Benefits to the stakeholders

Most of the benefits provided to the individual users stem from the functionalities and tools available at each terminal. Their value is largely dependent on users' specific goals or needs. For instance, a successful market operator may prioritise filtering applications, managing waiting lists, and selecting suitable traders over advertising for more traders. Customising the system to meet their specific requirements is crucial for operators.

Meanwhile, for local authorities, accountability, reliability, and standardisation of processes are priorities.

Benefits to the industry

While the platform's combination of benefits such as enhanced access to trading opportunities, faster application processing, improved marketing and exposure, sector-wide communication, and streamlined monitoring of trading activities are all substantial, its standout feature as a digital solution is its ability to tackle the industry's primary challenge: fragmentation.

Fragmentation pervades the industry, with varying stakeholder interests, political and geographic boundaries, and hierarchical departmental structures within governing bodies. The platform excels at mitigating this fragmentation.

Reducing the impact of fragmentation due to the stakeholders' divergence of interest

Expecting a digital solution to eliminate the sector's divergences would be unrealistic. However, the platform effectively encourages stakeholders to collaborate as a cohesive team committed to advancing the industry's welfare while leveraging the provided services to serve their interests. Here is how we achieve it:

During the registration process for traders and local authorities, or when operators set up their accounts and create an event, users must provide information and materials that are not necessarily related to their usual duties but create added value for themselves and other stakeholders.

Subsequently, whenever a user interacts with the platform, the system automatically furnishes other users with relevant information and tools they need.

For instance, upon completion of a trader booking, the stall is automatically listed in the relevant local authorities' officers' accounts (Licensing, EHOs, trading standards) along with all necessary documents, trader details, and inspection history. Additionally, the stall is automatically added to event/market public pages. Traders can include promotional material such as daily discounts, which generates content for social media posts promoting the stall, trader, and market.

Thus, by simply processing the application, the operator has helped relevant local authority officers execute their duties, promoted the stall and trader, and allowed traders to advertise special offers to the public, who may then share them on social media, further promoting the market.

Reducing the impact of fragmentation due to geopolitical boundaries.

Local government faces a pressing issue: the absence of communication channels among officers working in similar capacities but for different local authorities. The industry's transient nature exacerbates this problem, impacting traders operating across multiple locations and monitoring their activities.

The platform facilitates a more cohesive approach among departments involved in interpreting legislation, implementing adapted policies, and effectively enforcing them. Officers using the platform can monitor trading activities across jurisdictions and benefit from their counterparts' knowledge and expertise in other areas.

Here are two real-life examples of issues: one faced by a trader and one by an officer.

- After an inspection, an officer prohibited a stall holder from using alcohol on his pancakes due to the lack of an alcohol licence and documented the incident using the platform. The following week, the trader attempted to apply for a Temporary Event Notice (TEN) with a different local authority but was informed that it was unnecessary as the alcohol was "in" the food and not served "with" the food.

The second officer also utilised the platform to document the incident and inform the previous officer of the misunderstanding in interpreting the legislation. Other registered officers could learn from this experience and consistently apply the legislation.

- During an inspection, Trading Standard found that the parts of popular small wooden toys were getting loose and posed a risk to small children. While the toys appeared to be CE-approved, a further inquiry revealed that the EC stamp was a fake, and the glue used did not conform to EC regulations.

Using the platform, the officer could have informed every relevant registered operator, trader, and officer by flagging the trader on the system. Have the trader remove the toy permanently from his stall and ensure the trader was unable to sell the product on any other market in other authorities.

A cohesive and consistent approach allows for better monitoring and reinforces the officer's credibility.

Reducing the fragmentation due to a top-to-bottom management structure.

The platform empowers the market manager in multiple ways.

1. The account preferences allow the operator's policies to be implemented automatically.
2. Automated activity recording and key performance indicators allow:
 - To give the market manager more autonomy and take initiative when necessary while still being accountable.
 - To document the manager's and staff's activities effectively, ensuring that any actions taken can be justified, endorsed, or reviewed in case of challenges.
 - To identify potential problems and to help resolve issues when they arise.
3. Provides the market manager with verified data to construct compelling arguments and effectively represent the market's interests.
4. The seamless transfer of information and knowledge between managers to maintain consistency between staff changes.
5. The system enables user-generated information from ground level to be incorporated into the decision-making process of a vertically structured management.

In a nutshell

When we first developed our system, it was simply a method for users to save time and resources. However, as the system evolved and revealed its inherent benefits to the industry, we recognised the necessity of adopting an approach tailored to the industry as a whole.

Retail has massively changed over the last decades; street markets are at the core of much of this change, both positive and negative.

To propel our industry forward and enable traders and operators not just to survive but to thrive, we must adopt a cohesive, collaborative, and progressive attitude.

Our system provides the tools, data and technology needed to facilitate this transformation, enabling the sector to remain competitive amid various retail formats. We hope that others will also recognise its potential and join us in creating a thriving environment for our industry.

Should you be interested to know more about the services or have any additional question please do not hesitate to contact us using the email address provided below:

Contact email: info@themarketpeople.com