SUCCESS STORY: BIG BUS TOURS-CHICAGO

Big Bus Tours Finds a Labor Management Tool That Moves With Them

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Their Story

Big Bus Tours was a business that was stuck in the past, using time-consuming methods to handle operations. When they decided to invest in labor management tools, there was a huge difference across the board with the overall happiness of the staff and management team. With the ability to clock in and out remotely, assign and track employees and automate payroll input, Hotschedules has become an integral part of the way Big Bus Tours runs its hop-on-hop-off business.

Challenges

- Scheduling was taking up too much time and using spreadsheets was inefficient.
- They had no way for employees to clock in or out remotely.
- Entering payroll manually was too time consuming.

Solutions

- HotSchedules
- HotSchedules Webclock

Results

- Better company-wide communication for last-minute changes.
- Saved three hours a week using HotSchedules time and attendance tools.
- Managers use Hotschedules to assign and track team member location and forecast sales.
- 100% user adoption.
- Employees can punch their timecards remotely resulting in a better work-life balance.

What does a double-decker tour bus have in common with a restaurant?

At first glance, it may not seem like much, but both businesses are in the hospitality industry and both rely on a combination of salaried and hourly staff. Or, in the words of Big Bus Tours Senior Vice President Joey Robinson, "Tour guides are like our servers. Drivers are like the chefs."

So when Big Bus Tours decided to implement a labor management platform, HotSchedules was the obvious choice for their operation. "Within our hop-on/hop-off niche, we're the largest one, and we've continued to grow," Robinson says. "As soon as I saw HotSchedules, I was hooked."

The Paper Chase

Big Bus Tours introduces great cities to visitors from all over the world and in the windy city their vision is to be the No. 1 thing to do. Although the company continues to make big strides across the globe, just a few years ago, the scheduling was steadfastly paper- based.

"We lived in the '80s," Robinson says. "It was 1992 in 2015. We lived completely off paper. It was such an inefficient and time-wasting system. To me, anything that gets repeated on a daily basis should be automated. And we weren't. It was taking up so much time to do the very simple task of scheduling."

While having drinks with friends in the restaurant industry, Robinson complained about the paper pile- up.

"I was saying, 'There's got to be a better way, but I haven't researched
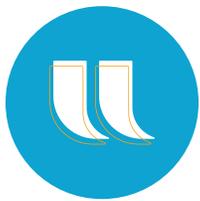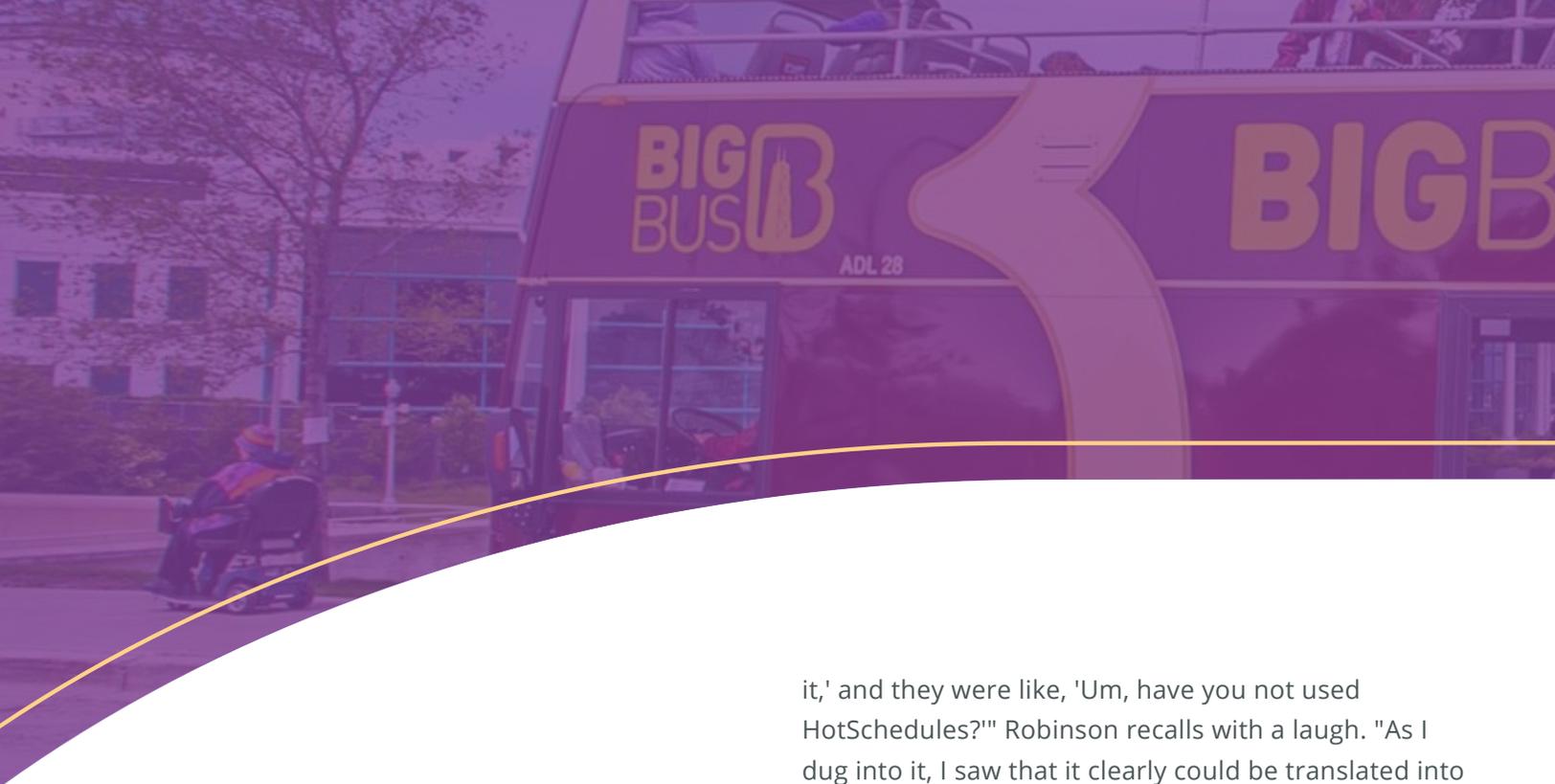
JOEY ROBINSON
Senior Vice President, Big Bus Tours

The majority of them are tour guides who pick up a shift, can't make it to the office first and need to go straight to the tour start location. Thanks to HotSchedules Webclock, they clock in and out remotely. After the tours are finished, they can clock out on the spot and leave from downtown, which is more convenient for them."

it,' and they were like, 'Um, have you not used HotSchedules?'" Robinson recalls with a laugh. "As I dug into it, I saw that it clearly could be translated into our business because we're actually very much like a restaurant."

In September 2015, Chicago became the first Big Bus Tours outpost to implement HotSchedules. They are looking to roll out the online scheduling solution to other cities.

"It solved major time-wasting problems for us," says Robinson.

All Aboard

With a large—and largely mobile—workforce, HotSchedules seemed to be a natural fit for Big Bus employees, which made implementation all the more seamless."We have a digitally savvy, young crew," Robinson says. "We had a huge buy-in across the board. They were surprised we weren't already on a digital platform."

HotSchedules worked so well with Big Bus employees it became ingrained in the company's culture. "Because of HotSchedules, having a smartphone or access to the internet has become a requirement for our team members." Robinson says. "It's in our culture now." Employees can also call into HotSchedules' award-winning Customer Care Team to access their schedules 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Tour Supervisor Mark Robinson agrees that he's seen the shift to a culture of technology. "For a lot of our employees, everything happens on their phones," he says. "Their laptops have been holding up a corner of a table for the past two years, so to have the ability to swap and release shifts from their phones is very handy."

Making Email Extinct

With the success and simplicity of communication tools that HotSchedules offers, sending an email has become a thing of the past. "It's replaced email for the majority of our business," Joey Robinson says. "Not for the high level team, but as far as our indirect communications, it's all on HotSchedules. It's top down and peer-to-peer."

For example, HotSchedules has helped simplify the partnership Big Bus has with the famed Chicago improv troupe Second City.

"Second City does some cool training with our tour guides so we can learn some interesting improv and have a comedy approach to our storytelling," Robinson says. "We've been communicating to our tour guides on HotSchedules about the Second City training and getting RSVPs. It's replaced emails and texting."

HotSchedules has also been used for other communications, including broadcast messages about new initiatives and timely announcements, such as if the weather dips below 10 degrees and tours are cancelled.

"The majority of the interactions are shift exchanges, but there are even some people who have used HotSchedules to sell their furniture," Robinson says.

Taking it to the Streets

Big Bus is a mobile business in multiple senses of the word. In addition to those big buses driving around, operations encompass 14 locations around the Windy City where customer service representatives have

permits to sell tickets. Within HotSchedules, each of these 14 stations are set up as Locations.

"When we assign Customer Service Representatives to a schedule, we assign them to that location," Robinson says. "We set specific sales targets for each location, so it's helpful for the rep to know where he will be. We monitor that so we can give everyone an equal chance because some selling locations are better than others. We use HotSchedules to keep track of who is where so they all have that equal opportunity to sell."

In addition to the CSRs having stations throughout the city, tour guides may find themselves starting or ending a shift somewhere other than the base of operations. This is where HotSchedules' capability for clocking in and out remotely using the HotSchedules Webclock, their time and attendance tool, comes into play.
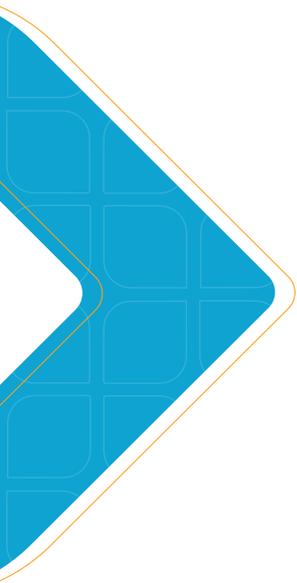
MARK ROBINSON

Tour Supervisor, Big Bus Tours-Chicago

"I'm on HotSchedules every day between the PC and the app. I look at the roster, and it tells me who is supposed to be where and what time they're supposed to be there... It's very convenient because it keeps track of where people should be."

"We're spread across the entire city, there are some instances when someone on our staff needs to clock in remotely. It so happens a few times a day," Robinson says. "The majority of them are tour guides who pick up a shift, can't make it to the office first and need to go straight to the tour start location. Thanks to HotSchedules Webclock, they clock in and out remotely. After the tours are finished, they can clock out on the spot and leave from downtown, which is more convenient for them."

Tracking the Talent

The huge buses may make it seem otherwise, but Big Bus Tours is a business built on human resources. Prior to HotSchedules, Mark Robinson did the scheduling each week using spreadsheets and then had to email and text shifts to employees. During the summer high season, that schedule covers between 35-to-45 tour guides a week, many of whom are part-time employees juggling other gigs and acting auditions.

"Overall, HotSchedules saves me a lot of time," says Robinson. "I'm on HotSchedules every day between the PC and the app. I look at the roster, and it tells me who is supposed to be where and what time they're supposed to be there. If I need to call someone, I can easily pull up their phone number. It's very convenient because it keeps track of where people should be. I use it as my checklist in the morning."

He also relies on HotSchedules reports to let him know when employees are getting close to overtime, and with his phone, he's able to approve shift swaps remotely.

In addition to saving management time by shifting the responsibility of swapping and releasing shifts to the employees, HotSchedules also alleviates a major headache for payroll thanks to its function. Prior to its implementation, the Big Bus payroll coordinator was inputting all the scheduling information manually, resulting in a savings of two to three hours per week.
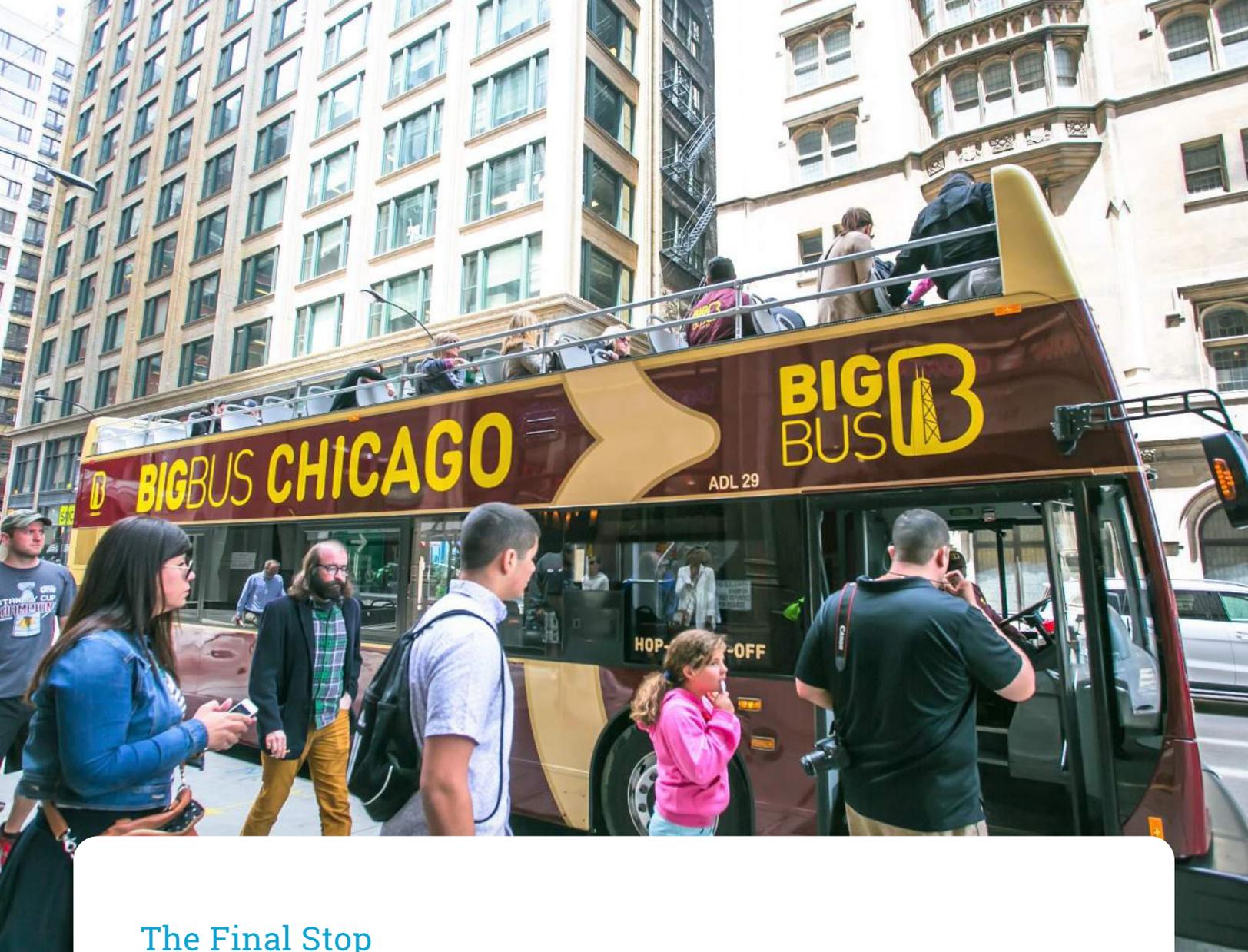
The Final Stop

For Joey Robinson, the biggest benefit of HotSchedules is having communications all in one place.

"I'm a firm believer that the most successful businesses live in simplicity," he says. "This has made our business much more simple to manage. We have a lot of moving pieces. Most businesses do. We're heavily operational, high on payroll, high on staff. To manage the human element of the business is very difficult. If we were a tech firm offering software as a service, our product would be more living in the digital space, but we are relying on human resources to deliver our business, and HotSchedules has made it much, much simpler to do that."