

Book review

Operating a Bus and Coach Business. By ANN BREWER and DAVID HENSHER. (St Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1997.) [Pp. 220.] \$35.00. ISBN 1 86448 458 6.

Once in a while, it is useful and necessary to read overviews of subjects, which one should follow up on but cannot due to pressures of time. It was in this spirit that I offered to write this review, to make sure that I actually did investigate the issues involved in running public transport services in a deregulating environment. To start with, my main problem with this otherwise invaluable book is that its flyers do not clearly identify the intended audience. The Preface, however, states it clearly: 'This book forms a centrepiece for the Certificate of Transport Management (Bus and Coach) (CTM) participants in Australia. It parallels the CTM curriculum . . .' This is both the strength and the weakness of the book for the non-Australian reader. The strength lies in the insights it gives into the particular problems that Australian public transport operators are currently facing in all aspects of operational and management issues. For the non-participant in the CTM course, the weakness lies in the necessary lack of interaction between the oral elements of the course and the written materials in the book. What looks sometimes uneven in the book is undoubtedly made up for in class, in additional discussion, and by what the authors can assume to be already known by their particular audience. This is also reflected in the subtitle of the book: 'Insights and Practice', which does not promise comprehensiveness.

The book covers a wide spectrum of topics, ranging from an excellent review of the current regulatory framework in each of the Australian states, to the issues of strategic planning, personnel and safety management, marketing, costing and financial management, and including a chapter-long, instructive case study. The coverage of costing/pricing goes further than the other chapters, as the issue of avoidable and non-avoidable costs is of central importance to the daily operations of a bus and coach company. The coverage does not aim at mathematical thoroughness, but highlights issues which are of direct concern to an audience of practitioners. Sometimes the reader actually seems to sense the presence of the parallel overhead slides, which structure the presentation in class.

In summary, this is a useful book, but with limitations due to its primary Australian audience. It can be read with gain both by specialists who want to understand the Australian situation better, and to compare the topics stressed in the book with those they would highlight themselves, and by non-specialists, like myself, who are given a well-rounded, if country-specific, introduction to the problems of running a small to medium sized service firm offering transport services.

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