

My career in brief...

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Job title: Managing Director – Northern Europe
Employer: Expedia



1. Please give a brief overview of your career history – where you started, how you progressed, the companies you have worked for etc.

This is my 23rd year in the travel industry. I started aged 17 in the call centre at Butlins. I spent 7 years within the Rank Group Holiday Division which Butlins was part of – progressing to the roll of Marketing Services Manager. I made conscious career choices including moving into tour operating and online with roles at Cosmos and lastminute.com. I became Sales Director at Cosmos aged 29 and had to work hard to convince the board I could cut it at a young age.

Lastminute.com opened my career up to the online travel market. I was approached by Thomas Cook to be part of their team to launch a serious online player, but due to a combination of operational and financial challenges for the business I moved on to the best role I could have wished for at Expedia. I have been with Expedia nearly 4 years and have learnt more in that time than the rest of my career so far.

2. Have you always wanted to work within hospitality and tourism? If not, how did you end up where you are now?

Growing up in Bognor Regis, you are embedded in the culture of tourism. It's what made the town tick and thrive. Butlins was the biggest employer in the town and it's highly likely most residents work that at some point. I learnt very early, that 'right time, right place' would be a good message to take forward in my career. My sister worked at the Butlins call centre and this was one of the better jobs that you could have there. She pulled a few strings and I started working weekends and evenings whilst studying at College.

Right time, right place also benefited me in other career moves. I targeted lastminute.com as a business I wanted to work for and after their MD sponsored me to run the London Marathon, I thanked him and asked him for a job. Six months later I became their Sales Director for Travel. It was very clear to me early on that things were not going to work out at Thomas Cook - maybe a case of wrong time, wrong place – and I had accepted the chance to go back to lastminute.com. Luckily for me I received the call from Expedia exactly at the moment I was about to post my signed contract back to lastminute.com. It was then down to me to convince Expedia I was worthy of the role – and quickly!

3. What sort of qualifications and training have you had?

Bognor Regis Community College: 1986 – 1991, GCSE's – 8 grades A-C

Chichester College: 1991 – 1993, A levels in Geography and Business Studies, RSA Computer literacy- Level 4

Portsmouth University: 1993 – 1995, HND Business & Finance

I put a lot of my career down to on the job training, coaching guidance and some excellent leaders I have learnt from. I also put it down to my up-bringing and common sense. We work in an industry that we love – there are very few people who don't like to go away and all of us are customers. This is all on-going training and personal development to me – I have a lot to learn still. Someone once said to, "Some people dream of success, others wake up and work at it".

4. What are the top 5 activities you would typically carry out on a daily basis?

- Analyse the numbers – often people look more at the numbers if there is something wrong. I also like to look at the patterns and insight when they are good. It tells me something is going well and we can do more with it.
- Speak, lead, motivate, develop and communicate with my team. These are people I see more than my family and I have learnt that you need a strong, effective and motivated team to make you the leader and successful person you want to be. I pride myself on seeing them develop in their careers. Many people have developed my career and it's why I have been able to progress. I thrive on seeing my team develop and a stronger team, makes me a stronger and more effective leader.
- Manage meetings and emails. I am challenging myself to be more effective with both email and meetings. The aim is to ensure they are effective and proactive. I want to ensure they drive actions and have a purpose.
- Challenge the norm. When I joined Expedia both within my team and as a business we needed to challenge everything we did. We needed to remove a culture of "That's how we do it" and openly question why and how. We have kept this ethos and we now have a culture of test and learn. We can test anything and we learn so much more – we look forward not backwards.
- Remove barriers and support for my team. I would not call Expedia a political business. Sure, we have headwinds and I am there to solve these for my team, but we are also a business that solves these things quickly and removes barriers. I am there to take these challenges off of my team and empower them and the business to move forward.

5. What do you most enjoy about your job?

Lots! The people and the teams, the industry, travelling, leading, motivating, smashing our financial plan! By default and because of my competitive artisan personality type, I love hitting and beating the financial and trading numbers – that's my go to motivator, but more and more I thrive on developing my team and sharing in their personal and team success.

6. What would you say is the biggest challenge you face on a daily basis?

Ensure that we don't become complacent and live with momentum. Expedia has had a very strong run, but we are nowhere near 'done'. We have so much more to achieve, and when we have done that, we will have so much more to do. Technology, business and the customer behaviours and demands move so quickly now, that we need to stay one step ahead.

Alternatively, getting my kids to bed is a big challenge!

7. What would you say is your biggest achievement to date?

My default answer would be the trading performance of Expedia, but I would also call out the personal development of my team – my four original direct reports at Expedia have all moved onto Director Roles. On a personal basis, being asked to speak at the House of Commons was a personal achievement.

8. Who has been the greatest influence/role model in your career and why?

There have been a number of leaders that have all brought very different things to my development and career, but John Bevan (lastminute.com) and Gary Morrison (Expedia) stick out. I have learnt more from Gary at Expedia than I have the rest of my career. John taught me huge amounts about leading teams – people wanted to come to work just because of John.

9. Do you have a favourite tale or most memorable moment from your career? If so, please tell us about it!

Speaking at the House of Commons gave me (and my mum) huge personal pride. Meeting my wife at Cosmos definitely has to be called out. Those aside I have far too many stories that I look back on and giggle – although in hindsight, causing my boss's car to break down before he had a 5 hour drive to his wife who was in labour was not a moment I should be proud of!

10. What piece of advice would you offer someone who wants to work within our industries?

People, people, people – listen to them, mentor them, be coached by them, learn from them, be a customer, respect them, lead them, be one of them. People buy from people and we are all customers in our own industry.

11. Why would you encourage someone to work in our industry?

It's such a great industry – who doesn't love holidays? The people are great. The products we sell are inspiring and rewarding. The technology is advancing and in some businesses, cutting edge. I don't think I have ever met anyone who says they hate the industry – it's fun and rewarding. I don't have any ambition to leave the industry.

Further information

For further information on career opportunities at Expedia please visit www.lifeatexpedia.com

For further information on career opportunities in passenger transport and travel please visit www.careerthatmove.co.uk