



Take DISH. Add Bridgehead. Mix in dash of ingenuity

MAKE WAY FOR THE VEGGIE VAN

By Joanne Chianello, Ottawa Citizen

When your mother told you it was nice to share, she likely wasn't talking about the company car.

Yet in an inventive move that has cut operating costs, fuel emissions and puzzled insurance companies, two Ottawa companies have decided to share a vehicle for their day-to-day operations.

Bridgehead Coffeehouse and DISH Catering, located blocks from each other, have been sharing a Dodge Sprinter for a month or so. "When I was in Paris last November, I saw everyone driving these euro vans," says Erin Clatney, owner of DISH. "It's narrow and completely flat inside—perfect for catering.

Back in Ottawa, she discovered the van came with a \$60,000 price tag. "So I coveted the van for awhile."

A few blocks east along Wellington street West, the people at Bridgehead were in the same predicament.

Wit coffee shops from Elgin Street to Westboro, it was taking staff up to four runs to deliver thousands of pounds of coffee, baked goods and other supplies from their central kitchen to their five locations. They needed a commercial delivery van, and coincidentally were considering the Sprinter, but the price was out of range.

As luck would have it, though, DISH serves Bridgehead coffee at its functions, and while two firms discussed business, the subject of the van camp. And then they came to a revelation — Bridgehead makes its deliveries from 5:30 to (a.m.; DISH caters in the afternoon and evening. Why not split the costs?

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“It has worked out extremely well,” says Trevor May, operations support manager of Bridgehead. “But joint ownership has some issues.

Like insurance. Both the company’s insurers were surprised at the arrangement, but found a way to accommodate the plan. And instead of buying the van together, the vehicle is in Bridgehead’s name while DISH pays a per-kilometer fee — much like a rental agreement.

“We took a lot of time to hammer everything out in advance, says May. “We wanted to make sure we were all on the same page.”

The concept of vehicle sharing is gaining popularity in most of Canada’s big cities. In Ottawa, VRTUCar now boasts 500 drivers and 23 automobiles — a far cry from seven people sharing a single car only five years ago. They have six corporate clients, such as EnviroCentre and Mountain Equipment Co-op, as well as dozens of professionals who use VRTUCars for business.

But the concept of directly sharing a vehicle with another firms is revolutionary. And makes sound economic sense.

“We actually got the idea from VRTUCars,” says May, adding that Bridgehead was a customer for years, but that the VRTUvan was simply not big enough to meet the company’s needs.

“We’re environmentalists,” he continues. (Bridgehead sells only organic, shade-grown, fair trade coffee.) “We try to reduce the amount of energy we use. We knew a van was necessary evil. Given that. The Sprinter is the best option.”

The Dodge Sprinter—part of the DaimlerChrysler line — is actually made Mercedes in Germany. Since its introduction in Europe 10 years ago, more than a million have been sold there. Imports to Canada began in 2003, and we’ve bought up 3,000 so far, but they’re not easy to get a hold of. Only one dealer in Ottawa sells them — Southbank Dodge — and it constantly has a waiting list. The supply out of Germany is limited, and interest in the diesel-fuelled van is growing, especially as gas prices increase. {a liter of diesel costs about as much, or sometimes less, than gas and its proponents claim that drivers can double their mileage with diesel over gasoline.

But the DISH-Bridgehead team goes one better. They fill up exclusively at Topia Green Stop, which sell B20 Bio Diesel, a fuel made of vegetable oil — including the gloop in the grease traps from your favourite chip truck. (B20 refers to the 20 per cent of the fuel that is made up of BioDiesel — the rest is the usual variety.)

Bio Diesel promises it will improve the performance of your engine, reduce smog and is the only fuel classified as non-toxic.

Which is all good for two companies who want to get the job done with as little effect as possible on the environment. They even have a pet name for their new favourite business too: The Veggie Van.

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