

**by Matt Powell, Business Growth Manager,
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Many of you will be aware that I have recently moved to the area from Bristol, where, amongst other things I used to run a petrol station/convenience store (the busiest in the city outside of the hypermarkets).

It just so happens that this particular site was in a neighbourhood called St Pauls. Again, many of you will know of it, and the reputation for drugs, prostitution, gun crime and gangs is not entirely unfounded!

Every year, St Pauls has a carnival which brings in tens of thousands of visitors from across the country and further afield (it is the biggest Afro-Caribbean festival apart from Notting Hill in the UK) and whilst running the petrol station, it provided me with my biggest dilemma every year – carnival day was far and away the busiest and most profitable day of the year, but it came with the biggest headaches in terms of stock levels, staffing, security, everything, in fact!

The petrol station was a 24-hr operation, but customers were served through hatches overnight. This caused problems on most Saturday nights, especially when the carnival was on, so one year, I decided to keep the doors open! This was a calculated risk, and it took some persuasive talking – both to my company (health and safety!!) and to my staff (oh no, drunk people in the shop!). However, I got my way – clearly I made sure that I was one of the staff rostered on for the night shift.

There were two significant outcomes. Firstly, takings on that night were something like 80% up on an average busy Saturday night and about 40% up on other carnival nights. Secondly, rather than creating a long queue of frustrated customers outside, we brought the carnival inside - I can honestly say it was one of the most enjoyable night shifts I ever did! (And yes, there were some problems, but less than the average Saturday.)

So, the moral of the story? Well, with Trevithick Day looming, I guess the question to ask is: how will you capitalise on potentially the busiest day of the year? Clearly, the answer to this question will be different for nearly every business, but one thing is for certain and that is that it shouldn't be treated like a normal Saturday (you'll either have more customers or more hassles or both!).

And a final couple of thoughts to bear in mind: does Trevithick Day give you an opportunity to collect details from customers and potential customers (could you do a prize draw, for example) that you could use in future marketing campaigns? And what records do you keep, so that next year you can be even more geared up to make a success of the day? (Every year while at the petrol station, I would get to December and wish I'd made a note of how much milk and bread we had sold the previous year!)

And finally, finally, remember to enjoy the day – I'm sure that the sound of money rattling into the tills is the reason I look back on St Pauls Carnival with fondness!

Happy Trevithick Day to you all.

