

France's ride-share site BlaBlaCar buys European rivals

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Car sharers shake hands after a trip between the French cities of Grenoble and Lyon on September 5, 2012

French website BlaBlaCar said Wednesday it was swallowing up its German and Hungarian rivals, cementing its spot as Europe's king of ride-sharing as more and more cash-strapped travellers look to share car journeys.

Created in 2006, BlaBlaCar offers a site where people making the same car journey can get together and split travel costs.

It claims to have more than 20 million members across 18 countries in Europe and Asia, and in a record for a French start-up, managed to raise \$10 million (9.4 million euros) in 2012 and then \$100 million in 2014.

The company said it had bought up its main rival, Germany's Carpooling.com, which has been around since 2001 and was originally supported by German carmaker Daimler.

However it did not reveal how much it paid for the site.

It also announced it was buying Hungary's Autohop, giving it a slew of new customers in Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Croatia.

BlaBlaCar can now "offer a unified ride-share service in the whole of Europe with no borders from Amsterdam to Zagreb," the company said in a statement.

Sharing rides has become increasingly popular in recent years, particularly with cash-strapped younger people.

"For two years, I've used BlaBlaCar one or two times per year to see my boyfriend who works in Brittany," said 24-year-old Pauline, a student in Paris.

"In general, the people who use this mode of transport are green, open, nice. Sometimes at the end of a long week, I was dragging my feet at the idea of talking to strangers, but the discussions always ended up being fascinating.



Michael (2nd left) says goodbye to people he has just brought to Lyon from Grenoble on September 5, 2012 under a car sharing scheme

"Some drivers and passengers even exchange numbers at the end of the trip," she added.

Others are less romantic about the service.

Paul, a 30-year-old from Paris, uses the service from time to time "not for meeting people, nor to save the planet, but just to get from A to B in the cheapest way possible."

BlaBlaCar began in France before spreading to neighbouring countries. It reached Russia, Ukraine and Turkey in 2014, and this year made its debut in India.

It says recent subscribers have an average age of 33, and many older drivers are being attracted to the service.

"I suggested it to my mother who lives in the countryside and she's taken it up," said 23-year-old Marion, another Paris student.

The company's founder and president, Frederic Mazzella, already has his sights on new markets, notably Brazil.

The acquisitions were welcomed by France's Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron, who wrote on Twitter that "French tech is on the way to becoming a new leader of the digital world".

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