

CUSTOMER SERVICE, LOWER COSTS AND THE DATA EXPLOSION



By Corinne Watson

The keen focus on costs has arrived. Whilst we do not face the issues here which are currently live in the UK; imminent 2 pence per litre rise in fuel duty and trucks flooding across from Europe with their double tanks full of cheaper diesel, there have been enough column inches and sleepless nights dedicated to the diesel prices. So what can you do?

You can't do much with the cost of your RUCs, overheads or driver wages. Neither can you do anything with the price of fuel or tyres, but you can reduce the amount you need to buy.

You can also keep pushing the Customer Service angle. I am a firm believer that business success is based on customer service. About listening to your customers, working in with like minded operators and adding value in the area that you specialise in. It is this amongst everything else that will keep your customers loyal for longer.

This is not just a ramble about business administration, but Customer Service and controlling costs are linked. Customer service is straightforward in principle; you have your standards and you make sure that you and your office based staff work to them. But what about your drivers?

They see your customers far more often than you do and can say and do things there which you can't control. If they are stressed, this doesn't bode well for customer service.

Not only does courtesy take a hit if your drivers are stressed, but so does the gas pedal, the brake pedal, fuel efficiency and tyre life. So now your customers are complaining and your costs are rising....

There is a school of thought which says that linking your Engine Management System (EMS) to your GPS system so you can get real time information out of the engine bay will solve all these issues.

Never let it be said that throwing more data at a problem makes it go away.

Picture each of your drivers. Who is the best? The most reliable, most accurate paperwork, tidy appearance, diligent in loading and securing freight, looking after the vehicle, doesn't speed (too often) and keeps his (her) logbook and vehicle compliant?

Who is the worst driver in the fleet? Of all of those in between, who could use a little improvement?

I once heard it said 'I'd rather tell him he was useless in bed than tell him I didn't like the way he drove his truck.'

With no clear evidence to support your opinion of each driver, this will ring true with many of you.

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But do you really need EMS? A short survey of Canterbury driver trainers confirmed that the driver who is rough on his truck, is also the driver who is gruff with the customers and will find an excuse to stop at the depot or the coffee shop more frequently.

So, if you operate the right kind of truck (preferably North American), have signed up with the right GPS supplier and have time on your hands to interpret all of the engine management data, you can have EMS connected to report through your GPS system.

For everyone else, no matter what vehicles or machines you operate, you can have reports which are

- Simple and easy to read

- standard across all vehicles
- comparable between vehicles
- easier to understand
- available to be printed and handed to drivers

The standard reporting suite from most GPS systems will summarise for you;

- speeding
- excessive idling time (engine on)
- excessive stop time (engine off)
- late starts (the driver was at work on time, but what time did the truck leave the depot?)
- operational time which exceeds log book entries


A driver with a poor record on any or all of these is also likely to have poor driving standards and poor vehicle control. So whilst you can spend the extra money on EMS to get data on rev ranges, oil pressure, heavy braking, fuel consumption, water temperature etc, etc, why would you?

We monitored a fleet of 30 vehicles which reported 2500 speeding events (over 5kmh) in ONE WEEK. How would your fleet compare?

We printed off the standard report from the GPS system and made each driver aware of his record. Over 3 weeks, this was reduced to 1900 events per week. Most drivers were disappointed that they looked so bad. A simple exercise and a real saving in fuel and potential speeding tickets.

But also, if the drivers know that we support them in driving at the right speed and arriving safely, it has knock on effects for load stability, driver stress, customer service and your outlay on fuel and tyres.

Systems DO NOT overrule gut feel or management intuition, but they can provide supporting information to help you put things right.

Don't make it complicated. The right approach, simple principles and a desire to improve are enough to make a real difference. 

GPS based fleet management system? 1. Right Approach 2. Right System 3. Right Results



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