

So much more than a spy in the cab

By Corinne Watson

Installing a GPS system into a delivery vehicle may seem like a good move in terms of heightening security, but does it reflect badly on how much a company trusts its drivers? Corinne Watson looks at the issue.

Freight transport companies are in business to make money. They make money by providing a service to their customers which is valued. The service that their customers value most of all is a well-presented, undamaged cargo delivered on time.

The extras which make the difference can often be determined by the attitude of the person who deals direct with the customers. In many cases, this person is the delivery driver.

Driver attitude is generally determined by the attitude of the employer. For the most part, professional drivers take immense pride in their job and will go to great lengths to keep the promises which the company has made to its customers. This might mean driving faster and longer than the rules of the road



require, or unloading during a 'rest period' in order to deliver the goods.

Yet in this commitment to the cause, they risk compromising the very thing that enables them to work – their driving license.

Is too much 'can do' a bad thing?

So when a transport company considers putting GPS into its fleet, it needs to be sure why it is doing it. Management and drivers are on the same side. They are both in the business of building customer satisfaction.

GPS shouldn't be a tool to be used against the driver, rather one to help a company understand how it can help the driver by reducing the risk and stress which they undertake on the company's behalf.

Good reasons for considering GPS include improving customer service, preventing accidents, or using it as a marketing tool. Each of these can be successfully realised using similar approaches, but clearly defining motives before starting out will make the end result much more achievable.

In essence, GPS helps a company to understand its business better. It brings increased visibility into the most expensive and least controllable aspect of the business. It has the ability to build a profile of a driver, a vehicle, a route or a contract, but the first question to ask is, what will you do with the information once you have it?

Exception reports are a powerful ally. Having set up parameters, a company is able to monitor how many times they are exceeded. For example, how often do drivers have to exceed 95 km/h in order to get to their destination on time?

The next question is, why? Is it a company or a driver issue? What are the consequences to the driver (licence jeopardy); vehicle (potential accident); cargo (damage); or company (loss of one or all of the above), possibly resulting in the loss of a contract?

A company should determine why the driver feels the need to speed. Is it to:

- Cover the distance? Are they being asked to go too far in the available time, given the configuration and power of their vehicle, the weight of the load and the terrain to be negotiated on the way? How much does the risk increase when the weather deteriorates?
- Recover lost time at the depot? A depot turnaround report will indicate too much time spent at base and some investigation

should soon determine whether it is due to a comfortable canteen or if there is a more significant delay due to poor loading practices or paperwork availability.

- Compensate for anticipated or actual time lost at the customer's site? Does the customer keep the driver waiting because they are not expecting the load, or the loading method used is not compatible with the customer's handling equipment, or the delivery time clashes with that of another supplier?

The majority of New Zealand's professional drivers are out there doing their best for their companies and customers. Installing a GPS system should be seen as a great opportunity to support them by making changes which support the long-term viability of the business.

Companies should use the available information to understand what their drivers do for their clients and take steps to minimise the stress that they shoulder on the company's behalf. After all, a relaxed driver is a safe driver, and a great ambassador for the company when he cheerfully presents himself and his cargo to the customers.

Corinne Watson has worked in both operational and project management roles in the UK with some of the major logistics players and has a growing NZ client base. Her Christchurch-based company, CCS Innovation in Logistics works with transport and logistics companies to leverage GPS data as a means to achieve tangible productivity improvements. For further information, see www.ccslogistics.co.nz

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