

Warning! - technology alone will not improve your business!

By Corinne Watson

There is an extensive array of technology solutions on offer to assist with operational visibility, job dispatch and information capture. However, without a sound, structured approach to selection and implementation of these products, many companies are finding themselves swamped with data without having achieved any significant business benefit - as it was put to me the other day; "I've got data coming out of my ears and I don't know what to do with it."

The secret to success lies in the preparation. The three key stages are: identifying an opportunity, specifying a solution and selecting the right tools, and committing to continuous improvement

Identifying an opportunity

The motivation to improve an element of your business may stem from the discovery of a new product on the market, an improvement in customer service or a reduction in cost. Understanding the value that you add to your customer's business will help you to assess a valid addition to your service offering.

Specifying a solution and selecting the right tools

Unfortunately, the solution to the opportunity does not lie in a shrink wrapped box. Clarifying how products and information currently flow through



Corinne Watson has worked in both operational and project management roles in the UK with some of the major logistics players and established CCS Innovation in Logistics in 2003. "We believe that transport operations can and should be more efficient," Ms Watson says.

your organisation is a critical part of the implementation process. Where an existing manual process will be automated, the decision making process needs to be broken down into a series of logic 'rules' by which the new dispatch system can judge each assignment. This is the difference between subjective and objective decision-making and can lead to some long held assumptions being challenged. Understanding the process and why and how it has changed with the new package enables the results to be seen as an opportunity for further improvement.

Having assessed internal issues, the selection of the technology requires a degree of preparation. Functionality is the obvious decision factor, but consider also the hardware (units to be issued to drivers need to be fairly robust) and accessibility (some software can only be accessed through nominated and licensed PCs). What are the reporting options and how user friendly is the system? In addition to all of these considerations is your choice of provider. This is the beginning of a partnership, not a one off purchase so it is important that your provider understands your goals and will commit to helping you to achieve them.

Committing to Continuous Improvement

Introducing new technology into a transport operation normally increases the visibility of activities. One of the risks associated with this is the temptation to instigate in depth analysis into all available reports.

Decide what is important to the business and express it in no more than 6 KPIs. Typically these will relate to a measure of customer service, operational efficiency, financial performance and staff satisfaction. Then determine which of these can be monitored through reports from your system. Common examples include delivery on time, vehicle idling time, customer site turnaround time and fuel consumption.

Conclusion

Investing in technology is a commitment to the continuous improvement of your business. Use the systems as one tool in your management toolbox. Retain the focus on how best to deliver value to your customers.

It is important to remember that it is the added value of the service to customers that will differentiate you from competitors and keep you in business. Having data "coming out of your ears" benefits the salary bundle of an operations analyst rather than your business!

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