

Smart Drivers

Mobile IT gives you absolute knowledge of what, where and when, you're delivering a load. IT makes your driver a dynamic contact for customer service.



by Anselm Waterfield

Your driver is the first point of contact with your customer. If you can give him the information to do his job better then you can also improve the standard of customer service delivery. The problem is your driver is on the road, he is not particularly computer literate, he's busy and he is on his own.

Fortunately there are a range of mobile IT options that can send and receive relevant customer information, when it's needed so that the driver can respond quickly and effectively to the customer's needs.

Digital Paper At the simplest level there is Digital Paper, a new technology with enormous potential for the transport industry. Customer information, for example a POD, can still be captured on paper, but a special optical pen reads the information and transmits it directly back to head office where the data is immediately stored on the customer's job records. With potentially hundreds of deliveries a day a company using Digital Paper is assured of up to the minute accurate customer delivery records. Consignment notes, driver's run sheets, log books arrival and departure times are just

some of the many uses. The advantage is that the information is immediately available and can never be lost.

SMS SMS or Short Message Service can deliver up to 160 character messages between driver and head office. However a driver can respond to pick up and delivery queries with a single key stroke and this data can be translated into a pick up and delivery report for customers as well as notifying operations on progress. SMS is best used for single transmissions with limited driver interaction.

WAP WAP or wireless access protocol provides internet access to the mobile phone. This means the driver has access to more information and can use the mobile phone like a computer. Unlike SMS there is no limit to the information he can gather or provide, however the driver has to be in a coverage area and he will need some training to operate WAP effectively. Approximately 75% of new mobile phones are WAP enabled. With GPRS, WAP phone costs have come down as you don't pay for time on the system only for the amount of information transferred.

PDA PDAs or personal digital assistants have been available for

some time now and work just like hand held computers. Prices have dropped significantly in the last couple of years and software has been developed to provide a very simple user interface which makes them easy to use and handle lots of information. PDAs can be used to collect electronic signatures, scan barcodes for freight handling and can print out hardcopy for customers if required. They can be used to control workflows better, to manage driver fatigue and can expand into route mapping with the addition of GPS.

Mobile IT has become much more affordable and accessible in recent years. Because it reduces the difficulty of communicating with drivers, it makes it easier for them to be a part of your team helping to improve the standards of service given to your customers. It will be an absolute MUST within your business in the years to come. ■

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