Giving The Old System The Boot

technology *Lessons learned from a technology upgrade.*

By Peter Carter

Early in its history, CCT, an LTL carrier based in Mississauga, Ont., decided to develop an in-house IT system, working with a computer consultant who, frankly, did not know much about trucking.

The system worked out fine for a while, but it only handled accounting functions and did not have track/trace, rating, or web capabilities that shippers increasingly were demanding.

Coincident with this, CCT was growing quickly, from $3.5 million in 1999 to over $35 million in the next decade, placing increasing pressures on its IT system and capabilities. When the aging system became so unstable that it needed rebooting each afternoon, CCT general manager Dave Campbell and vice president Sales Ian Brooks worried that its next crash would be its last.

Campbell and Brooks decided not to make the mistakes of the past.

Rather than taking their chances again with a new system built by an IT consultant, Campbell and Brooks decided to buy a system from a software and systems provider who specialized in LTL carriers and with whom they were familiar from previous experience. (They went with a Carrier Logistics FACTS system, incidentally.)

Today's Trucking asked CCT for a checklist that similarly sized growing carriers (between 35 to 40 trucks) could consult when considering an investment in software, so that a person won't make the same early-days mistakes.

Before you buy, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the system have everything you need?
  - Accounting
  - Track and trace
  - EDI
  - Web
- Will the system have the capacity to grow to keep pace with the fast growth projected for your business?
- How many programmers will you need? The best system, Campbell and Brooks concluded, may be one enabling them to employ few or no programmers.
- Have you checked references of your

CRASH COURSE IN COMPUTING: Brooks and Campbell didn't want to repeat the same software mistakes they made first time around

I.T., YEAH, **THAT'S THE TICKET**
BUT DON'T FORGET TO INCLUDE A DEADLINE DATE

Even though their business is growing at a pace far faster than they anticipated, Dawn and Alvis Violo will finally be able to get a good night's rest.

In 2006, the Violos launched **Emergency Roadside Services Canada of Canada (ERS)** intending to be "The CAA of the trucking business."

For the few first months, they focused on Southern Ontario, assembling an army of garages, tire experts, tow-truck operators and anybody else who might be available for broken-down truckers.

The idea was that the Violos would be able to coordinate emergency roadside service no matter where the caller was, for a flat rate of $48 per call.

ERS does not mark up the supplier's invoice. Says Alvis Violo: "We provide a copy of the vendor's invoice to our customers in order to keep our services completely transparent. No other business in this industry does this for their customers."

As business grew, and because they were starting the business from scratch, the phone beside the bed was seldom quiet.

Then two big customers, Walmart and Sysco, requested EMS expand across Ontario and Quebec. That meant more breakdowns in further-flung places; and also, bilingual staff.

Enter FedEx. "In 2007," says Alvis, "we received a call from FedEx Freight Canada and they wanted us to cover all of their terminals across Canada and some of the Northern United States."

Now, they have about 15,000 suppliers, covering both countries, in every province and 48 states. It took about a year to set up the American contacts.

About two years ago, they decided it's high time for high tech.

Company president Dawn Violo calls the resulting system their "on-line ticket system."

"Our customers now have the ability to view their service calls online 24 hours a day from anywhere that the Internet is available," she says.

Customers still talk with a real person when they call for help, but because of the new system they can log in and track their call-outs, their invoices and their emergency-call history.

Alvis Violo says the software development took almost two years to develop and adds that if he has advice for anybody installing a specialized software package it would be "include in your contract a specific completion date for the project.

"Along with a completion date, you should also include a specific penalty for each day the programmer is late with his program. If you do not include specific penalties, your program might take two years to build just like mine did."

Violo reports that because he was producing a program for a business model with no precedents in Canada, he could not buy an off-the-shelf package so found himself spending "hundreds of

ALWAYS DARKEST BEFORE DAWN: Violo's ERS Canada provides glimmers of rescue for broken-down drivers.

hours" sitting next to the programmer, instructing him exactly how we needed the program built."

The new system kicks-in this month.

So far, the jury has this verdict: "I could not even begin to explain how much easier the ticket system will make our lives. Dawn and I will be able to log into the ERS ticket system from anywhere in the world and see what is going on."

"The ticket system will make everyone's life easier, including our staff and our customers."

prospective vendor to determine track record, trucking industry experience, ability to handle system startup/implementation, training, responsiveness, and support?

- Have you taken any steps to assure the reliability/stability of any system your prospective vendor would recommend?
- Have you determined whether the vendor's system will be fast enough to meet growth and current business needs—scanning capability/real time data/visibility/transparency/connectivity to drivers' mobile units?

Will the system under consideration meet your need to attract new business and meet competition?

Can the system incorporate future enhancements?

Campbell and Brooks are now focused on further improving the system using real-time scanning technology, particularly scanning by drivers as they travel their routes and CCT expands even further. ▲