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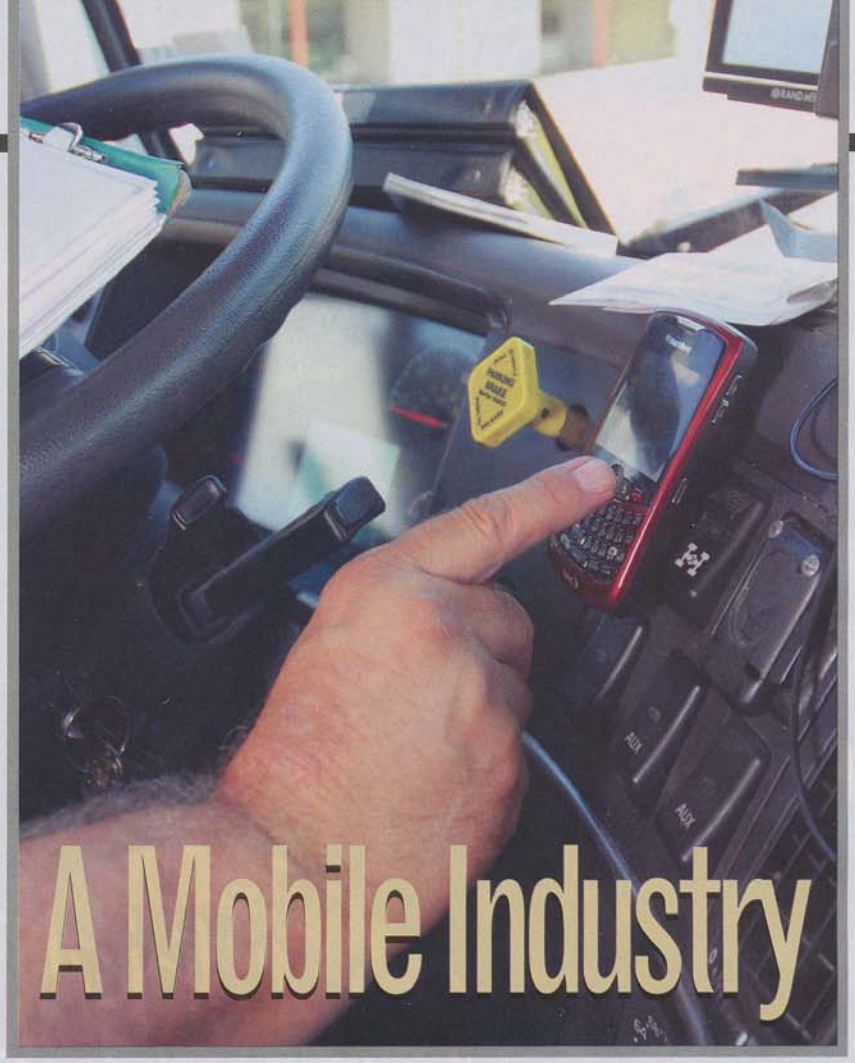

JIM PARK

A Mobile Industry

Cell phones, handhelds can be useful tools to stay connected with drivers.

Cell phones today are nearly second-nature. You can walk down the street and see almost everyone holding one. And it's almost impossible to imagine how the trucking industry did without them. It's not really that long ago that drivers had to search out pay phones to call their dispatcher, or were limited to short text messages on a satellite communications tool.

There are many different types of hardware you can use to keep tabs on drivers, including in-cab computers, laptops, routing solutions, tracking and monitoring devices, as well as handhelds devices and cell phones.

The in-cab, mounted computer offers a powerful, dynamic device that can support a number of different applications and keep a fleet's operations tied to the truck, the center of its business. This installed solution is often preferred, especially among large carriers, according to research conducted by Clement Driscoll, president of C.J. Driscoll & Associates, which does consulting and market research in GPS fleet management and related areas.

However, 80 percent of fleet operators said their drivers use cell phones to communicate with headquarters, according to Driscoll's research on cell phone use. "It's very common for drivers to have some kind of mobile communication device," he says. Some carriers use cell phones in addition to in-cab devices. Others can't afford to deploy computers or don't need all the capabilities, so rely solely on cell phones to communicate.

We got you covered

The use of cell phones and mobile handheld devices in the industry has evolved as the amount of coverage on the road has changed. In the 1990s, Driscoll says, satellite-based systems were the norm for fleets to communicate.

Over the years, as cellular phone companies such as Sprint and AT&T have become more competitive, the coverage across the country has become more ubiquitous, and a driver is nearly never out of communications range.

According to Harold Allen, senior marketing manager at AT&T Business Solutions, AT&T's network reaches 98 percent of the population. So even if a truck driver loses coverage while traveling, "they know that in a very short time, they'll be back in coverage."

Not only has coverage improved, but also the cell phones themselves have evolved to where they now can send data, not just voice. With today's wide cellular bandwidth, more data can be transferred over the network, as opposed to satellite, Allen notes.

One example of texting functionality being put to use is TMW's D2Link, a mobile data solution that connects the dispatcher to the driver to streamline load assignment and asset management. The application, designed to run on GPS-enabled wireless phones, enables drivers to communicate with dispatchers through a text format. This allows dispatchers to send out load assignments to 40 drivers in the time it used to take to talk to one driver.

Diana Britton • Managing Editor

As technology has improved and competition between wireless providers has expanded, drivers have been able to get more coverage on the road.

Igor Glubochansky, director of marketing management for AT&T Business Solutions, says 3G technology allows for the simultaneous use of voice and data. This third generation of mobile technology was meant to facilitate growth, expand bandwidth and support more diverse applications. Text messaging also provides the extra benefit of leaving behind a documented trail, he adds.

"By turning your employees' phones into remote data collection units, management can view the drivers' activities, view bread crumb trails for stops and routes taken, which provide accountability for the driver and reliable arrival time for customers," says David Ellis, trucking industry solutions manager at Sprint. "The data that's generated can be stored, making management reporting a snap."

These devices have further evolved to the point where they are no longer just sending and receiving data, but also creating it, says Ben Wiesen, vice president of products and support at Carrier Logistics. Through Carrier Logistics' Facts Mobile Path Driver

Before You Jump in the Cab: A Safety Precaution

Safety concerns about the use of cell phones behind the wheel have been front and center lately in the national media. Performing such tasks as text messaging, talking and dialing while driving has been proven to distract drivers and increase the risk of crashing.

Recently released studies on the topic have drawn the attention of a group of senators, who rolled out new legislation that would ban texting on a cell phone or other device while driving.

A study by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute on driver distraction in commercial vehicle operations found that text messaging and dialing on cell phones were key distraction tasks, and that drivers were 23 times more likely to get into an accident when texting.

Using in-cab video taken from about 200 truck drivers and about 3 million miles of driving, the institute analyzed and measured the impact of driver distraction on crashes and other performance errors by looking at the types of tasks drivers were doing and what their eyes were focused on.

The study found that tasks such as text messaging and dialing while driving posed the most risk. Out of a span of six seconds, drivers' eyes were looking off of the forward roadway for about five seconds while texting in the middle of a critical event, the data showed. Drivers who were dialing a cell phone during a critical event took their eyes off the forward roadway for about four seconds at a time.

For commercial drivers, however, the act of talking or listening to devices actually had a protective effect. Talking actually reduced the risk because it helped drivers to stay alert, said Richard Hanowski, director of the center for truck and bus safety at Virginia Tech. "It was the dialing component of the cell phone, or the texting if you will, that was really where the risk was associated with."

> "It was the dialing component of the cell phone, or the texting if you will, that was really where the risk was associated with."

This is at odds with an older study done on the general public, which points to talking itself as a distracting culprit. A National Highway Traffic Safety Administration study released earlier this year, withheld from the public since 2003, found that hands-free mobile technology presents as much of a safety hazard as handheld devices. It reported that simple conversation can disrupt attentive scanning and information processing of the visual scene.

Many states already have laws in place against the use of phones while driving. Currently, it is illegal to talk on handheld cell phones in six states. Sixteen states and the District of Columbia currently have laws banning all drivers from texting.

These laws are in addition to a new federal bill, the Avoiding Life-Endangering and Reckless Texting by Drivers Act, or "ALERT Drivers" Act, sponsored by U.S. Senators Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.), Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), Mary Landrieu (D-L.A.) and Kay Hagan (D-N.C.). The rule would mandate that states enforce the texting ban within the next two years or lose 25 percent of their federal highway funds per year.

Communication platform, mobile devices can automatically collect data and send it to the dispatcher, eliminating manual data entry by the driver. This type of system can capture data including time stamps, arrival and departure information, and out-of-route alerts.

Tracking the driver

Tracking equipment assets has become commonplace. But now carriers are finding certain advantages in being able to track the driver as well, through handheld devices. Like cell phones, these offer both voice and data, but also other capabilities such as barcode scanning and signature capture.

With a mobile device, a carrier can track the driver and inventory wherever they go, says Jeff Sibio, industry marketing director at Intermec – back of the truck, in a truckstop, in front of a customer. Sibio calls this "taking the technology to the point of work." This gives a fleet manager "visibility and control over the supply chain," he says.

Intermec recently rolled out new versions of its rugged handheld devices, the CN50 and CN4, with 3.75G and 3.5G wireless technology, respectively. Sealed from dust and moisture, these devices are made for the harsh environment of trucking work, with the ability to withstand drops from 5 feet.

One fleet that wanted to integrate handhelds was Northwest Food Products Transportation, which delivers dairy around the country as a subsidiary of Land O' Lakes. NFPT wanted to keep tabs on the deliveries made by the independent contractors it uses to supplement its company fleet. The company worked with Cadec to develop a handheld version of its DeliveryTracker application.

As an alternative to in-cab devices, cell phones can provide a way for fleets to track drivers, especially when they're doing work outside of the truck.

TECH BYTES

New Version of 3Sixty Software

TransCore has enhanced its 3sixty Freight Match Power software with version 2.0, which allows users to upload lists of up to 500 load or truck postings from their spreadsheets or transportation management system in the DAT Network. The new version includes a more intuitive interface, and provides truck freight brokers with integrated Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration ratings and SaferSys scores.

McLeod's Access Filters

McLeod Software has developed a Responsibility Filtering Module, which restricts user access to operational data and assigns business unit responsibility based on a company's hierarchal structure. It allows brokers and carriers with brokerage operations to keep orders and movements private from outside agents. The new capability is designed to function with the new versions of LoadMaster IX and PowerBroker II.

Xora, Gearworks Merge

Xora, Mountain View, Calif., has merged with Gearworks, Eagan, Minn., into one location-based mobile business applications provider. Under the name Xora, the two companies will offer their applications through partnerships with wireless carriers.

TCG Upgrades

Transportation Costing Group has made several upgrades to its Customer Profitability Tools. Version 4.3 of its Truckload Cost Information System includes enhancements to its Fuel-On-The-Fly feature as well as its Report Writer.

Pegasus Moves

Pegasus TransTech will move its headquarters to a new location in Tampa, Fla., and will open a third data center in Minneapolis to accommodate the company's growth. The company's data centers handle the document images scanned at truckstops throughout the U.S. through its Transflo Express scanning program.

Prophesy Teams With Microsoft

Prophesy Transportation Solutions is teaming up with Microsoft Corp. to integrate its dispatch software products with Microsoft Dynamics GP, the company's accounting solution.

"As our independent operator base expanded, we needed to ensure that those vehicles would be tied in to our overall fleet management system," says Roger Nordtvedt, director and general manager of NFPT. "Cadec's DeliveryTracker DCS enables us to do that easily and relatively inexpensively, without our having to install fixed systems in contract vehicles."

DeliveryTracker DCS, which runs on handhelds from Honeywell, Intermec and Motorola, provides the fleet with real-time information about delivery and pickup. The application includes a barcode scanner and signature capture capability, says Frank Moreno, vice president of marketing and product management at Cadec.

In the past, the owner-operators had to have customers sign paperwork, which had to be sent back to the home office, taking days. DeliveryTracker makes the transaction paperless and gets the data back to the office in real time.

While the Intermec products and the ones Cadec uses are actually more like small handheld computers, there are applications becoming available for regular cell phones as well. AT&T recently expanded its TeleNav Track GPS services to offer TeleNav Track Lite, a tracking service that provides real-time visibility of field employee locations. The service works on the AT&T wireless network running on virtually all AT&T mobile devices, and does not require software or GPS.

A low-cost alternative

If you compare the cost of a cell phone or handheld device to more traditional in-cab computers, the costs of installation and infrastructure are much lower, making the solutions an affordable alternative, especially for smaller fleets.

Ray West, director of product management at TMW, says smaller fleets tend to move faster in trying out their mobile offerings, as they're more agile and like to jump in on the fly. "They carry that device with them all the time anyway," he adds.

Almost everyone in the trucking industry already owns a cell phone, lowering the cost of implementation for fleets. Even if a driver doesn't have a phone, it is relatively inexpensive to purchase one, and some even come free with a data plan.

> "By turning your employees' phones into remote data collection units, management can view the drivers' activities."

"Many of our solutions require very little initial capital to get started, allowing our customers to start small and grow the solution as their business grows," says Sprint's Ellis.

For the smallest fleets, the owner-operator, there's even an iPhone application. For just a dollar, the Trucker app offers features such as a truckstop directory, repair services finder, owner-operator load board, a mileage calculator and a weigh scale locator.

The service was designed to keep drivers connected in an isolated environment, according to Donna Smith, president of Truth About Trucking, the company that designed the application. "You're isolated out there," she says.

But with cell phones, drivers aren't as isolated as they used to be. ■