

Strategies for Successful Technology Adoption by Owner-Operators

10 Steps to Excite Them About Mobile Communications

The benefits of satellite tracking and mobile communications technology have never been greater – increased productivity, reduced costs, more effective positioning of equipment and timely communications. But drivers – and owner-operators specifically – don't always understand that technology benefits them as well. To learn how companies have successfully implemented satellite tracking and mobile communications technology in owner-operator operations, PeopleNet contacted a wide range of fleets and compiled their best practices and management strategies.

Obstacles to Integration

Owner-operator drivers guard their independence fiercely and at best remain skeptical of many management initiatives, including satellite tracking and communications technology. They often perceive tracking as a corporate attempt to monitor their driving performance and prod them into “acceptable” behavior. In other words, as a way to limit their independence.

Owner-operator fleets must constantly protect the legal relationship that defines the independent status of owner-operators. As a result, it is not advisable to provide owner-operator drivers with technology equipment, which could open the door to misinterpretation about the relationship and associated tax issues.

In addition, consider operational issues. In a fleet that doesn't own the vehicle or control the equipment, management does not want their investment in mobile communications technology to drive away when an owner-operator quits. Margins in the trucking business are simply too thin to absorb that kind of hit.

Company-owned fleets with employee drivers can simply install the equipment and mandate adoption of mobile communications. But for companies using owner-operators the solution is not that easy. This paper discusses 10 strategies that can help ease the adoption and integration of satellite tracking and mobile communications for owner-operator fleets.

Translating the Value

Despite these roadblocks, owner-operator fleets continue to successfully encourage adoption of mobile communications. Here are some of their strategies:

1. Build relationships.

Implementing mobile communications technology will be met with resistance by drivers who do not understand or

trust management motives. A strong, trusting relationship paves the way for acceptance of new ways of doing things beyond technology as well.

Increasingly wider use of technology has proven that there are significant benefits for drivers as well as companies that leverage mobile communications. As drivers continue to work for carriers with mobile technology, they will become even more comfortable with it. For many drivers, technology has also become a large part of their personal life.

2. Sell the benefits.

Fleets must convey the benefits of technology to drivers so they understand that it affects them where it matters most—in the wallet. The president of one fleet noted that for drivers, it often comes down to the bottom line, “You have to demonstrate a quick payback measured in terms of more money or greater efficiency.”

Rather than simply selling the features of mobile communications technology, smart fleets focus on how the technology helps drivers get loaded faster, on the road sooner, unloaded faster, back on the road, and complete their route – all without having to stop and take the time to make phone calls. For instance, a geo-fencing application with GPS tracking automates customer notification prior to delivery, so customers are ready to accept delivery, minimizing detention time.

Another major selling point is constant access to e-mail, which allows drivers steady and affordable communications with family and friends.

Asset protection resonates with drivers who own their own vehicles. Electronic onboard recording and electronic driver logs can be a real advantage in eliminating or defending lawsuits related to accidents.

3. Target key drivers.

This is a key strategy in initiating an implementation. There are drivers in every fleet who are more cooperative, open to new ideas, and respected by their peers. In recruiting these drivers on the early adoption team, the fleet manager should meet with this core elite group first to get their buy-in. Look to them to carry the message/benefits to the larger driver group.

4. Communicate early and often.

Fleets that successfully implement mobile communications solutions get the message out to company drivers as well as owner-operators in a number of ways. Real-world

success stories from within the fleet build understanding, greater acceptance, and credibility. These stories should take multiple forms—handouts, brochures, meetings, and training sessions. Be sure to have the drivers themselves tell their own stories.

5. Make it their idea.

When drivers perceive that management is responsive to their concerns, they are open to suggestions that address these issues. In listening to what their drivers want—more miles, better loads, more control—managers can effectively posture tracking and mobile communications as means for helping drivers achieve their goals (See 2. Sell the benefits.).

6. Support integration internally.

Fleets must create a corporate culture that ensures the smooth and effective use of mobile communications. For instance, when the technology is integrated with dispatch, routing, and settlement, the company demonstrates to owner-operators that it is fully committed and invested in helping them achieve promised benefits.

7. Offer incentives.

Encourage early adoption through pricing strategies. Free installation or a discount for drivers who purchase the system by a certain date will grab attention. Special sign-up bonuses, lease-to-own offers, and promotions with giveaways are also effective. You should understand the ROI that the technology will yield and base your incentives on this.

8. Make it mandatory for new drivers.

Since some equipment is already mandated in many leasing contracts, consider making satellite tracking and mobile communications technology preconditions for new drivers. Your newer and perhaps younger drivers will likely be part of your core elite group (See 3. Target key drivers.).

9. Anticipate rejection.

Fleet managers almost universally said that the introduction of mobile communications did take some toll. A “try-it-before-you-buy-it” program may help alleviate driver attrition by easing participants into the fold. The mere fact that this approach infers a choice gives drivers an “escape” hatch, which takes the pressure off.

10. Be patient.

Technology solutions do not deliver all promised benefits on day one. It can take months before full value is realized. However, it is reasonable to expect incremental value on the way to that point. As fleet managers encourage adoption, the process will advance. As in any technology introduction, early adopters will be followed by the bulk of the flock and finally by stragglers. Experience shows this latter group often fades away through attrition at the tail end of the implementation cycle. And so it will likely go with owner-operators.

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