

The Power of Dashboards and Other Reporting Systems

Knowledge is power. Fleet managers who have access to vehicle and driver performance information when and where they need it have the power to make decisions that squeeze every ounce of profit out of their fleets. To combat economic challenges and fluctuating gas prices that thwart profitability, management needs control over the type of information they get, how frequently and when it's delivered, the format it's in, and the time period it covers.

Sifting through the Fray to Meet Your Needs

There are many dashboards and reporting systems in the trucking industry, each with their own advantages. But clearly, they are different along many variables. To assist you in determining which best meets your needs, this paper will discuss the variables that comprise dashboard and other reporting systems. The bottom line: choose the system that most easily and conveniently provides the information you believe you need to make you and your operation most successful.

Performance Metrics and Reporting Period

Engine diagnostics—where the rubber meets the road—are the very essence of vehicle and driver performance. The basics—speed, RPM, fuel efficiency, idle time, and hours of operation—are measurements that determine vehicle and driver productivity. The most valuable dashboards provide this information in real-time as well as other time periods.

However, it is important to note that the time periods covered by these systems vary, with some quite limited. It's a distinct advantage to have a dashboard with flexibility in its reporting periods, because extended time periods enable trend analysis for spotting early on potential problem areas. Of course, information related to safety performance is required to be maintained for either six or 12 months.

Report Formats

Systems vary in how the information is formatted, delivered, and accessed. In the case of format, consider text vs. graphics. Graphical displays provide a distinct advantage in terms of at-a-glance interpretations.

The addition of an easy-to-use, interactive tool that adjusts thresholds on the fly provides additional insights. At each set point for various performance metrics over various time periods, the top and bottom vehicle and driver performers are revealed. First, this is a quick way to identify those who merit recognition for outstanding

achievement as well as those who need coaching for behavior modification. Plus, the appearance of top and bottom performers provides a quick way to compare driver and vehicle performance in a terminal, region, or fleet.

Text reports have their place as well when comparing time periods to look for trends. They are even more helpful when able to toggle between various reports that compare performance: driver/vehicle performance to other drivers/vehicles in the terminal, region, or entire fleet; terminal performance to other terminals in the region or the entire fleet; and regional performance to other regions or entire fleet.

Delivery and Access

There's no question that when and how information is delivered and accessed affects the usefulness of dashboards and reporting systems. The ability to easily access dashboards at any point in time should be a given. In addition, automating delivery at specific intervals and times is not only convenient, but also practical. Dashboards and reports that regularly arrive an hour or two before driver meetings provide current performance information for review and action to take advantage of these events.

The easiest way to access dashboards, in between or in the absence of scheduled deliveries, is through the Internet—like most information today outside of our industry. Information that is always current and always available from any computer browser is bar-none the gold standard.

Delivery Activity Reporting

Delivery reports that are presented in a comparative reporting platform create a built-in management alert system. Fleet managers can easily identify anomalies that indicate the strong likelihood of a problem that needs addressing. It is important to note that information alone, without action, doesn't correct underlying problems.

To realize the full value of this information, management must investigate root causes and initiate action to eliminate the cause and negative results. As a human resources tool, the data may indicate a need for mentoring, coaching, or training about safety and security issues. Of course, these should be addressed as they arise for best results.

Planned vs. actual route data

EOBR data can generate reports about service and detention times that compare planned vs. actual routes for each driver and compare it to depot, region, and fleet averages. A planned two-day route that requires two and a half days and has delays in four out of seven stops poses questions. Have customers' receiving hours changed? Were there route detours? Are there customer situations that may be causing delays or putting the driver at risk?

Historical route data

A stop that has taken the driver an average of one hour over the past six months suddenly takes 90 minutes triggers questions. Is the driver required to perform extra activities?

Comparable load/driver data

If Driver "A" takes 45 minutes to deliver buns to Customer "X" and it takes Driver "B" 75 minutes to deliver a load of similar size/composition to Customer "Y", interview both drivers about potential differences. Find out if there is a customer variable that can be resolved to reduce delivery time to Customer "Y". Also compare other deliveries that Driver "B" makes to other drivers' similar loads to see if there is a pattern of inefficiency.

Real-time route data

EOBRs with an Automated Workflow application provide dispatch personnel visibility into delivery activities by driver/vehicle as they are unfolding. This real-time information enables dispatchers to "see" delays as they occur. When integrated with the routing application, the system can alert dispatch to late arrivals, departures and detention time.

A dispatcher who sees that a driver who has a 99 percent on-time record is detained for more than 30 minutes can proactively contact that driver to see if they are all right. If the driver does not answer, dispatch can contact local law enforcement or 911 to patrol the customer stop. Since any authorized, on-call dispatcher can access this information through any Internet browser, it's easy to be safe rather than sorry.

On-duty hours

An electronic driver log system improves driver safety on the road, helps manage HOS compliance, and improves payroll accuracy by more accurately tracking the number of hours each driver can safely and legally be on the road. Linked to the movement of the driver's vehicle, the system prompts the driver to answer questions when the vehicle has stopped. The system determines exactly how many hours the driver has been on duty without relying on the driver to manually enter the data. Dispatchers can do a better job of assigning loads to drivers to reduce the possibility of regulatory fines.

Additional Information Considerations

There are a few more informational areas to consider that protect trucking firms and their drivers, influence fleet safety, and affect performance:

Locating via GPS

The ability to retrospectively pinpoint the location of a vehicle, its direction, and speed at any given point in time via GPS is a tremendous asset. This functionality is instrumental in: defending legal actions against your company, protecting drivers against false accusations, and building credibility and strengthening customer relationships.

Messaging

Tracking the volume and content of both driver- and dispatch-generated messages can provide additional insight into behavior triggers that may cause erratic driver performance or aberrations in performance.

Fault codes and alarms

Monitoring exception-based performance against goals creates a behavioral profile for each driver that can be appropriately addressed. Performance pattern changes are an invitation to explore circumstances with drivers and customers that may cause changes in driver behavior.

Remote fault code monitoring can allow the notification of urgent vehicle distress signals at virtually the same time that they are indicated to the driver by instruments on the vehicle's dashboard. Immediate knowledge of significant vehicle problems can prevent costly maintenance repairs and prevent future potential breakdown situations.

System administration

Finally, the ability to track all changes to the very reporting system being considered is pivotal to maintaining the integrity of the system. Of course, changes may be made only by those who have proper authorization levels and passwords to further secure the system.

Summary

With all the dashboards and reporting systems on the market for the trucking industry, it can be a daunting task to analyze them all. To narrow your search for the automated dashboard or reporting system that meets your information needs, prepare your own checklist. Compare the ease and convenience that each system offers in providing the information that will make you and your operation most successful.

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