

Fleet managers increasingly seek new strategies

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A recent survey of 40 senior fleet managers from a range of corporate, government and not-for-profit organizations conducted by software provider Chevin Fleet Solutions found that 80% say they're experiencing "negative consequences" while relying upon "traditional" methods of managing their operations and are increasingly looking for new strategic paths to follow.

"In our experience, due to the increasing economic and regulatory pressures of operating a fleet in today's competitive and costly marketplace, we find that fleet managers – like all senior management within an organization – have less time to strategically plan for such rapidly changing conditions and spend most of their time reacting to the daily demands of operating a productive fleet," Ron Katz, Chevin's senior VP, told Fleet Owner.

"The findings from our survey should represent a genuine concern," he added. "Fleet managers need the ability to easily capture and consolidate vast quantities of information into straight forward actionable intelligence, allowing them to manage by exception rather than through instinct so they can deal better with the economic conditions pressuring them."

Katz said Chevin's survey revealed several critical points of strategic concern for fleet managers worldwide, not just in the U.S.:

- The most common "negative consequence" of using "traditional" fleet management methods revolved around inaccurate or lost data.
- Missed inspections, certifications, preventive maintenance and repairs came in a close second, with inaccurate vehicle assignments and cost allocations the next most common shortfall.
- Driver oversight and compliance management also came to the fore as a significant problem area where fleet managers had trouble maintaining proper controls.

That third concern is something Bob Davis, president and CEO of Virtual Driver Interactive, Inc.(VDI), said his firm's fleet customers are trying to use higher grades of technology to successfully deal with.

"Driver training, for example, is an incredibly expensive ongoing effort on the part of fleets, yet they are finding that 'traditional' training methods don't allow for ways to confirm if that training improved their decision-making skills behind the wheel," he told Fleet Owner.

After engaging in feedback discussions with fleets, VDI altered its training program to provide a 90-minute course taken via a full-sized simulator or via one crafted to mimic exact vehicles characteristics on a laptop, Davis explained.

“Efficiently run companies recognize that keeping company employees safe is the optimal way to save money, but in the past, choices were limited to lengthy classroom courses that do not keep employee attention or costly instructor-led ‘drive alongs’ that take multiple hours per employee to complete,” he said.

“Simulator training can not only lower crash incidents and associated costs, but also dramatically lower the cost of training while increasing the rate at which drivers are trained, while proof of course completion allows corporations to easily update training records,” Davis noted.

This is all part of what Davis calls the “new challenging fleet environment” managers must deal with, especially in terms of dealing with drivers.

“Two characteristic about most new drivers today: first, they probably never took a ‘traditional’ driver’s education class as a student and, second, they probably learned to play gaming systems long before they learned how to drive,” he pointed out.

“This is why new strategies are necessary: not only to deal with the cost of delivering training – such as reducing driver downtime to obtain it – but to make it more interesting to a generation with a shorter attention span, all while measuring whether or not they’ve absorbed the lessons you the fleet need them to learn.”