

EUROPE: STRATEGY - CASE STUDY



Setting up a global fleet policy is not an easy task. Our «Strategy» section is featuring several useful articles regarding the do's & don'ts in implementing an international process.



Softwired's CEO, Dr. Henry Wild, comments on the ICT [Mobile] advantages for fleet managers.

ICT dossier: Advantages for fleet managers

There is a great deal of activity within the information communications sector, and much of the technical detail goes above the heads of the average man in the street. So we asked some experts in the field to explain, in words we can all understand, why ICT is so important for efficient fleet managers.

If one fact can illustrate the huge upheavals in ICT over recent years in the area of cars, it is this: just a few years ago, car-phones were the latest gadget – with handsets connected by traditional curly wires, and looking just like the telephone at home. Now, in most countries, using them in the car is banned... Full circle in just a couple of decades!

Now, of course, the convenience of ICT equipment goes much further. And the challenges of ICT fleet management are great. Henry Wild CEO of Swiss-based mobile messaging middleware provider Softwired describes the challenges like this: "As with most initiatives, unless management is fully behind and allocates resources to effective fleet management, it is not going to be part of a business process. More specifically, a clearly defined strategic focus for a service that provides critical internal support for front line services needs to be addressed, such as asset procurement, fuel management, fleet financing, fleet maintenance, statutory compliance, along with strategic business processes such as policies, systems and resources".

Using the information

It has always been the case that the sheer quantity of information is, on its own, not of any use. What matters is what you do with it. Speaking at a recent ICT conference in Amsterdam, Guido Burger of Oracle put it quite simply: "What we are doing is getting real time information back from the vehicle to management. Integrating the information into the back end systems. Managers have to think about the big picture – assets have to be managed, drivers have to be safe... Information needs to be standardised and retrievable so we can leverage from it". On this question of how to increase data usage and value by synchronising fleet systems with internal back office systems, Paul Jaspers of e-Platform services provider Advantech Europe GmbH, with offices across the world, says: "The key should be to transfer data smartly and then also use the acquired data smartly. As an example, if the fleet management system is installed in taxis, then along with car dispatching, all vehicles' speed can be seen, and the back office is able to observe what traffic conditions are in real time. This in turn leads to this valuable information being used for efficient car dispatching. And each driver can also benefit from true real-time traffic information for self navigation". And what goes for taxis can also go for sales cars, service vehicles...

Efficient approach

Building an efficient ICT-based fleet management approach means being aware of the advantages it can bring. Henry Wild: "The first thing to do is to recognise that there are obvious productivity and efficiencies which can be gained through the use and application of ICT Fleet Management. This combined with significant cost savings has resulted in many major industries being significant users of ICT. Recent advances include compliance and accreditation systems – electronic-based vehicle checking solutions, designed to ensure compliance with statutory and other requirements and replacing paper-based systems. Fleet management packages are in use to monitor vehicle and driver behaviour and provide communication between driver and base. And driver performance issues are of interest both to governments and private industry. In the world of transport, for instance, the use of mobile e-business applications has enhanced customer expectations of reliable delivery particularly in the area of 'track and trace solutions".

TCO issues

The question of TCO is also fundamental to the reasons why ICT systems exist. Paul Jaspers points out some of the advantages: "ICT systems enable fleet managers to study drivers' behaviour, and provides real-time tracking and dispatch to improve vehicle utilization. In certain circumstances it can reduce overtime, billing errors and excess fuel bills and stop unauthorized vehicle use. All of this leads to increased driver safety, productivity and efficiency". Henry Wild adds some further considerations: "TCO can be advantageously affected both by monitoring – and thus being able to react or take corrective action based on exceptions – and diagnosing, which means identify the root cause of an exception. These tools ensure that ICT is both efficient and effective. ICT tools can monitor such items as fleet inventory tracking, preventive maintenance, repair maintenance, history recording, fuel tracking, parts inventory, work orders, and flexible reporting etc".

Appropriate applications

Trying to ensure that fleet managers are not drowned in technology, or that they do not buy sophisticated systems which will be of no real benefit to them, was where we started. And Guido Burger of Oracle summed up the question very succinctly when he simply said: "The start point is your business application, not our technology".

One thing is for sure: as roads get busier (and slower), and legislation creeps into more and more domains of transport and mobility in general, ICT solutions will be a necessity if compliance and costs are to be optimised.

Some of the technical jargon

"As a software messaging middleware provider, Softwired's iBus Mobile solution is agnostic both to the mobile device and the type of data we can carry through our mobile messaging middleware and hence we are not constrained by message types such as text, binary, image, XML, byte, long, double, and files. Consequently we are focussed primarily on the reliability [to Guarantee data delivery] of the communication layer – JMS – over unreliable and fragile networks, which for our customers are predominantly GPRS, WLAN and satellite". (Softwired)

For outdoor fleet management application – truck, tanker, taxi, ambulance, bus etc. – the 2.5G GPRS network structure is the most mature and cost effective choice and is the most popular one today. But GPRS bandwidth is 171.2kb/sec in theory. It is only good enough for short data transfer between vehicles and back end. However, the 2.5G bandwidth is fast enough for car-dispatch related application. If we are looking for economical and high-speed remote communications, then 3G/3.5G or WiMAX is the choice". (Advantech Europe GmbH)

[Tim Harrup](#)

Source: Fleet Europe.Com

Last update: 22-09-2008

About Softwired

Softwired AG, based in Bonstetten Switzerland, is a leading messaging middleware software firm developing and marketing its standards based Java™ compliant iBus™ messaging products worldwide. iBus™ Mobile is deployable as part of a mobile network for Java, Windows Mobile and other O/S mobile based devices from wireless SmartPhones, PDA's, pagers, scanners, personal computers and embedded devices. Softwired's iBus™ Mobile technology has global patents, patents pending and is trademarked by Softwired. Softwired is contactable at: info@softwired-inc.com, +41-43 466 07 87 or <http://www.softwired-inc.com>.