



STRATE

INCREASE DRIVER

The concept, “doing more with less,” feels like it was meant specifically for fleet managers. Today, the industry is moving its focus to the driver for increased productivity and reduced expense. **BY LAUREN FLETCHER**

AT A GLANCE

Today, increased scrutiny is being aimed at driver productivity to enhance a fleet's bottom line. Actions taken include:

- Increased focus on preventive maintenance.
- Reduced driver downtime.
- Use of technology, including telematics.

Fleet managers are tasked with constantly watching their fleet's bottom line, while also ensuring vehicles are operating efficiently and available to accomplish the mission of any particular fleet.

Fleet drivers are one of the major elements in that equation that can help improve overall fleet metrics, or drive them into the ground. Thankfully, there are several strategies fleet managers can implement to help increase driver productivity.

“When drivers are not maximizing their efficiency, fleets feel the effects,” said Brad Vlieg, VP of client solutions for Emkay. “An inefficient fleet is affected financially, and a lack of productivity can result in several things, some within the driver's control and some that are not.”

Diana Holland, director of fleet services for Merchants Fleet Management, noted that all company assets come with some responsibility to maintain and properly utilize them, from computers to company vehicles.

“A vehicle is no different than any other critical piece of equipment or property,” Holland said. “But, unlike some other assets, fleet vehicles require a reliance on the driver to take on some of the responsibility, including preventive and non-preventive maintenance, compliance with business and personal-use reporting, safety policies, state and federal laws for registrations and inspections, etc.”

Everything a driver has to do, other than drive his or her vehicle, takes time away from the job they were hired to do.

“The more streamlined and efficient it is for drivers to complete these tasks, the better. Tasks that stall or remain uncompleted can result in hefty fines, vehicle downtime, and a loss of reliability on the asset — all resulting in increased costs and a greater loss of driver productivity,” Holland said.

Driver productivity is important to all fleets, but is particularly important in the service industry.

“Within the service industry, driver productivity is what clearly delineates successful representatives and companies. One of the significant concerns is the balance between effective service, timing, fuel efficiency,

GIES TO PRODUCTIVITY

and safety,” according to Dan Shive, VP, risk management services for LeasePlan USA.

Increasingly fleets are looking at enhancing driver productivity.

“As we continue to squeeze dollars out of vehicles through rightsizing, optimal replacement cycles, and increased safety efforts, managing uptime will be the next big area to deliver incremental savings,” said Steve Jastrow, strategic consulting services manager for GE Capital Fleet Services.

In the end, all efforts made by fleet managers to improve driver productivity are aimed at one thing: protecting the company’s bottom line.

“While driver productivity is important for service and delivery fleets, the asset uptime is what’s paramount,” said Tom Keilty, SVP, customer and vehicle services & COO for PHH Arval. “It’s crucial to business and the total cost of operation to have services that keep the vehicle on the road.”

Ensuring Proper Vehicle Maintenance

One of the items within a driver’s control includes proper maintenance, the lack of which results in increased downtime for the driver and vehicle.

“The trick to having an efficient fleet when it comes to your drivers is to have them understand that, although, in the short term, the preventive maintenance practices may seem unproductive, the long-term benefits for the vehicles and fleet outweigh the short-term inconvenience,” Emkay’s Vliek said.

Going hand-in-hand with preventive maintenance is the concept of predictive analytics, or programs to help fleet managers fix a potential problem before it occurs.

“The introduction of predictive analytics can help schedule repairs before a failure, which can have a big impact on driver productivity,” said Jastrow of GE Capital Fleet Services. “Doing a repair on a part that has not failed will be a big shift in the fleet manager paradigm.”

Today, technology has stepped in to assist fleet managers, and drivers, ensure proper vehicle maintenance is performed.

From a service perspective, driver productivity is increased by building systems and programs to minimize the effect on drivers and maximize fleet gains. A proactive maintenance program is one technological key.

“A program that not only reminds drivers of upcoming maintenance through e-mails and text alerts, but also makes it easy for them to find the nearest service location and even make an appointment are tools that can save a fleet time and money,” said Vliek of Emkay.

Other technology initiatives enhancing driver productivity are being utilized by tech-savvy repair providers.

“Besides driver amenities, such as Internet and dedicated customer work areas, some repair providers have introduced tablets for their service writers to expedite the check-in process. Online repair appointment capabilities are becoming more common, in addition to text messages to inform drivers of a vehicle’s repair status,” said Eric Strom, accident and maintenance product manager for GE Capital Fleet Services.

Strom continued to note that calls to repair providers by drivers for status updates are also being enhanced at some shops using RFID technology. This technology tracks the vehicle location on the repair shop’s property as well as the repair status, providing the abil-

ity to quickly respond to a driver’s inquiries.

Fleets are also utilizing “mobile maintenance” services to help reduce downtime, and, in turn, keep drivers more productive.

“Mobile maintenance can be tailored to a fleet’s schedule, allowing preventive maintenance and routine repairs to be conducted during off-hours, such as nights and weekends,” said Wilson of GE Capital Fleet Services.

Wilson continued that this approach benefits the fleet in two key areas. “First, when maintenance services are tailored to the schedule of a business, the fleet is more likely to maintain the proper PM schedule, which reduces the frequency of unscheduled repairs. Second, the off-hours service reduces the need to remove a vehicle from circulation for routine service, keeping drivers on the road,” he said.

Technology to the Rescue?

Fleets are seeking enhanced driver productivity and convenient technology linked to cost savings, according to Strom of GE Capital Fleet Services. “For example, low-price fuel and maintenance network provider locators can deliver enhanced savings with just a few clicks,” Strom said.

Technology is the key theme behind many actions fleet managers can take to increase driver productivity.

“When it comes to driver productivity, the entire industry is focused on mobile technology,” commented Vliek of Emkay. “There are thousands of apps and computer programs available to help maximize a drivers’ time, when it comes to scheduling, reporting, or even finding maintenance or fuel. The world is at the driver’s fingertips.”

However, Vliek warned that the wealth

of knowledge accessible from a driver's seat comes with productivity issues. In an effort to maximize their efficiency, drivers are now multitasking while driving.

"They are making phone calls, checking e-mails, or looking up directions. All of these momentary distractions are what put drivers at an increased risk for incidents," Vlieg said. "Although the big push is mobile technology and easy accessibility, this needs to come with safe and efficient ways of training drivers to utilize the modern advantages, yet also do it safely.

Increasingly, fleets are turning to telematics services to achieve increased levels of driver productivity.

"While some of these gains come from merely monitoring potentially 'non-productive behaviors,' such as idling, excessive depot stop time, or excessive downtime, many fleets are using telematics data to drive improvements in average service or delivery times and overall 'productive' hours per day," said Mike Mrosko, telematics product manager for GE Capital Fleet Services.

According to a study done by PHH Arval on a client's fleet with nearly 7,000 locations, telematics implementation improved the fleets' average stops per day from slightly more than 10 to an average of 18.

"Average miles per stop decreased from about 16 miles to 8.5 miles per stop. When calculating the productivity gains of stops, mileage, and reduction in driver overtime, the studied fleet reduced mileage and saw productivity savings of \$270.55 per vehicle, per month," noted Keilty of PHH Arval.

Efficient route planning through telematics use can also help reduce unproductive time that a driver spends on the road.

"Similarly, re-routing enables a fleet to find the closest driver to a job and route them from their current location to a new jobsite," according to Tom Sloan, director, analytical product management for Donlen. "This ensures that the appropriate driver completes the job, rather than the first driver who saw the job in the system."

According to Holland of Merchants Fleet Management, the use of telematics devices is the biggest trend she is seeing to better a manager drivers' time.

"The overwhelming amount of data produced from these products allows fleets to

make savvy decisions about route optimization, properly dispatching jobs to the right skilled individuals, reduced fuel consumption, increased staff accountability, and more," Holland said.

Additionally, some fleets are utilizing telematics capabilities to eliminate driver paperwork.

"For example, by using geofences around customer locations, fleet managers can track the exact number of stops and amount of time a driver spent at a customer location, without the need for a driver to log such activity," said Mrosko of GE Capital Fleet Services.

While Shive of LeasePlan agreed that telematics is a huge initiative, he also noted cell-blocking devices and an increased focus on across-the-board driver training to enhance driver productivity.

"The usage of mobile applications to make drivers more efficient in reporting mileage, finding fuel and maintenance locations, and other tasks that can be seen as tedious and time consuming is also important," Shive said. "However, the greatest initiative is to ensure best practices are incorporated within a fleet's policies."

Increasing Productivity

In addition to ensuring proper vehicle maintenance, reducing driver and vehicle downtime, and enhancing productivity through technology and telematics, there are several other actions fleet managers can take.

"Improving driver engagement is a key consideration when targeting improved

driver productivity," said Paul Millington, technology product manager for GE Capital Fleet Services.

To help keep drivers engaged, productive, and focused on their tasks, Jastrow of GE Capital Fleet Services recommended "scheduling proactive repairs (sometimes onsite during off-hours to keep vehicle up-time optimized), utilizing Web tools to help drivers locate repair facilities and fuel providers, implementing telematics devices to enhance route optimization, and researching products such as toll and violation management services."

Implementing a toll program also serves as an opportunity for service fleets to ensure that all vehicles optimize their travel time on toll roads by using the electronic toll lanes instead of the cash lanes.

"Estimates of productivity gains have been 10 to 15 minutes per month, assuming the average queue at the cash lane is 30-45 seconds and approximately one toll per business day," said Jayme Schnedeker, fuel product manager for GE Capital Fleet Services. "For a 100-unit fleet within these parameters, this is up to 25 hours of unproductive time per month."

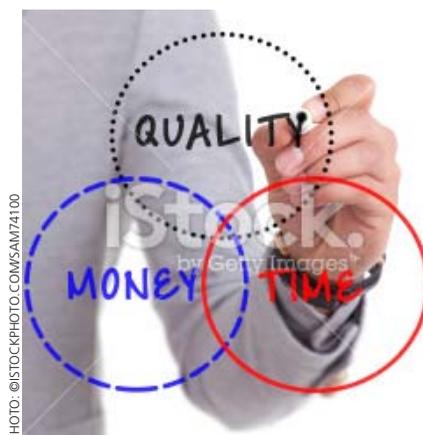
Rob Scaffidi, VP of licensing services for Donlen agreed about the importance of toll programs for increasing driver productivity.

"Avoiding long lines at DMV facilities and cash lanes on toll roads increases driver productivity. Utilizing a toll management program and responder helps drivers pass through stops more quickly.

"Efficient fleets have productive drivers," said Vlieg of Emkay. "The concept is simple, the tools and programs that are available for fleets are designed to not only improve driver productivity, but also increase your bottom line. When it comes to driver productivity, the long-term benefits outweigh the short-term effects."

The bottom line shows that the big push today is increasing driver productivity through a variety of policies, tools, and technology.

"Improved driver productivity, quite simply, allows drivers to remain focused on what they were hired to do: their job," said Holland of Merchants Fleet Management. "At the same time, it ensures the lowest possible operating costs for expenses that can be wildly variable if left uncontrolled." 



The quality of a driver's level of productivity directly impacts the fleets time and money.