



How fleet management can improve efficiencies in the field marketing sector

How fleet management can improve efficiencies in the field marketing sector

For businesses that employ workers who operate out in the field, keeping an eye on their movements can be tricky. One particularly difficult aspect is effectively managing your fleet of vehicles, whether your employees use their own vehicles, company vehicles, or drive vehicles obtained through a company car allowance scheme.

This white paper will explore the key issues and best practice for vehicle management; and how this can positively impact key areas of your business, such as compliance and margins. We examine the field marketing industry to analyse where you can boost the productivity of your workforce, reduce vehicle running costs and improve driver safety.

Managing a diverse workforce

Field marketing companies can have huge workforces, as they are required to complete a set number of calls within a specific time frame for their clients – and are often covering large geographical areas. However, due to seasonal surges in activity, workers are typically employed either on a short-term contract, or on a permanent basis known in the sector as “retained”. Retained staff usually have access to a company car scheme or company car allowance; whereas the tactical teams are only employed during busier periods will typically use their own vehicles to complete calls. This often creates a challenge when it comes to precise mileage capture for expenses claims.

Taken for a ride

According to research from leasing firm Flexed.co.uk, 89% of participants said they had at some stage submitted an inaccurate mileage claim while 63% had added personal miles to their total for personal gain. This type of fraud is the most common form of employee theft and can cost businesses thousands, if not millions, of pounds every year.

In many cases however, drivers may be duping their employer without even realising it. In the heat of a stressful day, it is easy for drivers to forget to keep a log of their mileage and make a rough estimate – sometimes at the expense of the company. For all businesses that employ field workers, keeping an accurate log of business and private mileage is critical to plugging the gaps in falsely-claimed expenses.

Planning in the dark

The way in which calls and schedules are planned can depend entirely on the organisation - some being more sophisticated than others. Some will use call file technology such as Caci to add postcodes of specific jobs and produce a call file which is allocated to a staff member. Others leave the planning to the staff themselves with no science running behind the scenes. In these cases, individuals are left to their own devices to figure out routes and schedules that are most convenient to them - however this is not always the most fuel efficient, productive or effective way to manage calls. It also means that workers are spending a large proportion of their time planning their workload rather than executing calls. Without the use of innovative software, the ability to input last-minute or emergency calls into an employee’s schedule is also limited - and can inflict further frustration on workers that had already carefully planned their call file.



Up in smoke

Fuel, along with vehicle acquisition, insurance, maintenance and depreciation, is one of the largest expenses for businesses operating vehicles. The way in which vehicles are driven can have a huge impact on fuel economy; therefore it pays for employees to ease off the gas. In addition to fuel expenditure, erratic driving styles also significantly increase the risk of having an accident, the frequency of wear and tear such as brake pads and tyres, and the carbon emissions produced by your vehicles. Research in 2017 by major insurer, Direct Line, found that bad drivers spend an average of £560 more on fuel a year because of excessive braking and acceleration. The study found that, by adopting smoother driving styles, drivers could reduce their average filling station visits from 20 to 12 a year, cutting their annual fuel bill by 40%.

For field marketing companies, unexpected vehicle downtime caused by accidents or wear and tear can impact heavily on an employee's call schedule and, in the worst cases, mean businesses can incur financial penalties for service level agreement (SLA) breaches.

Bumps and scrapes

In the case of field marketing, employees often spend their time in high traffic areas, or parked at supermarkets and shopping outlets. These environments can heighten the risk of accidents and minor damage to vehicles, increasing 'bent metal' costs for businesses. Without the correct technology, there is also no way of employers being able to qualify that drivers are being honest about the causes of damage to their vehicles.



Additional expenses

In many field-based industries, teams have to complete a number of call files during any given month. Due to the nature of field-based working and completing numerous visits to retailers, companies can incur additional costs such as parking fees and congestion zone charges - but these cannot always be qualified; adding another waste stream from the company's bottom line. More often than not, tasks are time-critical and for many businesses, being able to ensure that members of their workforce are where they say they are, and to receive a record of jobs completed, would be a highly powerful tool.

Planning

The planning process for field workers can be significantly streamlined through the use of effective route optimisation and scheduling software. The software is able to provide businesses with an automated call file which considers the number of calls to be made and the location of each visit. Powerful algorithms take into account many factors, in order to provide field workers with the most fuel and time efficient routes to take, enabling them to complete more calls than ever before.

Trakm8's innovative route optimisation software can be integrated into existing back office and ERP systems. The software can use a large number of variables to plan the most efficient routes and schedules, including number of jobs, drivers, vehicles, job locations, working hours, breaks, cost, home location, licensing, skills, vehicle capacity and functionality. Route optimisation can also be dynamic, in the sense that routes and schedules are automatically recalculated if new call files are added throughout the day - for example, a retailer may have run out of stock. The system is able to take this into account and divert resources accordingly as part of the driver's updated schedule.

Fuel

In addition to the mileage reduction benefits presented by route optimisation and scheduling, businesses can use driver behaviour-based telematics solutions to reduce their levels of fuel consumption. By monitoring pitfalls in driving styles and by utilising in-cab feedback that reacts to poor driving behaviour in real time, employees can be coached at the wheel on how to drive more efficiently. For business operating several vehicles or more, the collective benefits can be huge.

Driver behaviour analytics come as standard in Trakm8's fleet management platform; and Trakm8 also offers driver behaviour with in-cab coaching as a stand-alone solution. It monitors a number of parameters including speeding, harsh braking, heavy acceleration, sharp cornering and over-revving - all of which drain fuel unnecessarily. By creating league tables of the best and worst drivers, sufficient training and support can be given to those with the poorest scores and rewards given to those with the best. In our experience, recognising the best drivers is the best way to achieve your businesses goals when it comes to fuel. Easily-digestible data also enables businesses to quickly spot serial offenders and identify trends.

Risk reduction

From a risk reduction perspective, vehicles are constantly scraped and dented - particularly when field workers operate in high traffic areas or are required to park in shopping centre car parks. Employees may often claim their car was damaged in a car park during the execution of a job; however there is no way of qualifying the cause of the accident unless you have visibility of first notification of loss (FNOL) or are using dash cams.

The accelerometers within Trakm8's telematics devices combine with powerful algorithms to detect impacts to the vehicle. This capability enables businesses to capture vital intelligence that can be used to corroborate an employee's version of events, speed up and improve liability decisions, and reduce fraudulent or exaggerated injury claims. Trakm8's dual-edge algorithms filter out false positives such as speed bumps, cattle grids and kerb strikes to improve the accuracy of crash detection.

Trakm8 also owns the RoadHawk range of vehicle cameras, including forward and rear-facing dash cams as well as award-winning integrated telematics cameras - all of which collect irrefutable evidence in the event of an accident. For field workers, it is easy to get distracted when rushing between jobs; so with event-based footage, businesses can identify both accidents and near-misses and investigate the reasons behind them. For example, businesses may be able to recognise harsh braking events or see from footage that an employee was travelling too fast trying to get to the next call. With video evidence, managers can then get to the bottom of what is causing the distraction - whether that is through distracted driving or driver fatigue.



Accurate business and private mileage

Having access to a tool to automate business and private journeys can significantly reduce admin time for both the employer and its drivers. Telematics solutions are able to log accurate mileage and create automated journey summaries to qualify mileage expense claims.

Trakm8's Driver app allows companies to stay on top of accurate business and private journeys and ensure they don't end up paying for private miles. Before or after every journey, drivers can toggle between business and private mode, which then allows the company to easily export detailed mileage summaries. These can be downloaded at the click of a button in Excel, CSV or PDF files – whichever suits your business best. In addition, the Driver app allows drivers to monitor pitfalls in their driving performance, reduce risk and overall fuel expenditure.

Similarly, we provide a Fleet Manager app to businesses which allows fleet or line managers to gain insights into their employees while on the move. This data enables management to identify private mileage, how many calls have been completed in a single day, to ensure their vehicles are being driven efficiently and also make sure no vehicle health alerts are flagging up on the system.

Driver benefits

The benefits of telematics, route optimisation software and cameras to business is clear; however, drivers can also use these solutions to their advantage.

Because route optimisation automates the most efficient routes and schedules to take, the system takes away the need for drivers to do any in-depth planning and allows them to devote more of their time to the job they are paid to do. Similarly, the Trakm8 Driver app further removes the need to spend valuable time completing log books and mileage claims as the app is able to complete this action on their behalf.

From a camera perspective, drivers are blessed with an extra layer of safety and security while fulfilling their obligations. Within organisations such as field marketing, staff may often be driving their own vehicles and will therefore be presented with a cost if they need to make a claim. However, if their vehicle is fitted with a camera, they can quickly and easily demonstrate their innocence following an accident.



Effective communication

Solid communication between the business and its drivers is vital when implementing telematics. For drivers opted into a company car scheme, it is essential that, in the first instance, the business's company car policy has teeth. Without this level of clarity, businesses cannot ensure that their assets are returned at their maximum value at the end of the contract's life. It is also a lot tougher to guarantee that the business won't incur additional charges if the state of the vehicle is not satisfactory when it is returned. The best way to enforce an air-tight company car policy is through regular liaison between the fleet manager, HR manager and employee's line manager. With regular communication and telematics data, it is simple to identify high-risk traits within that individual's driver behaviour and create a relevant personal development plan as part of their regular performance reviews.

Grey area

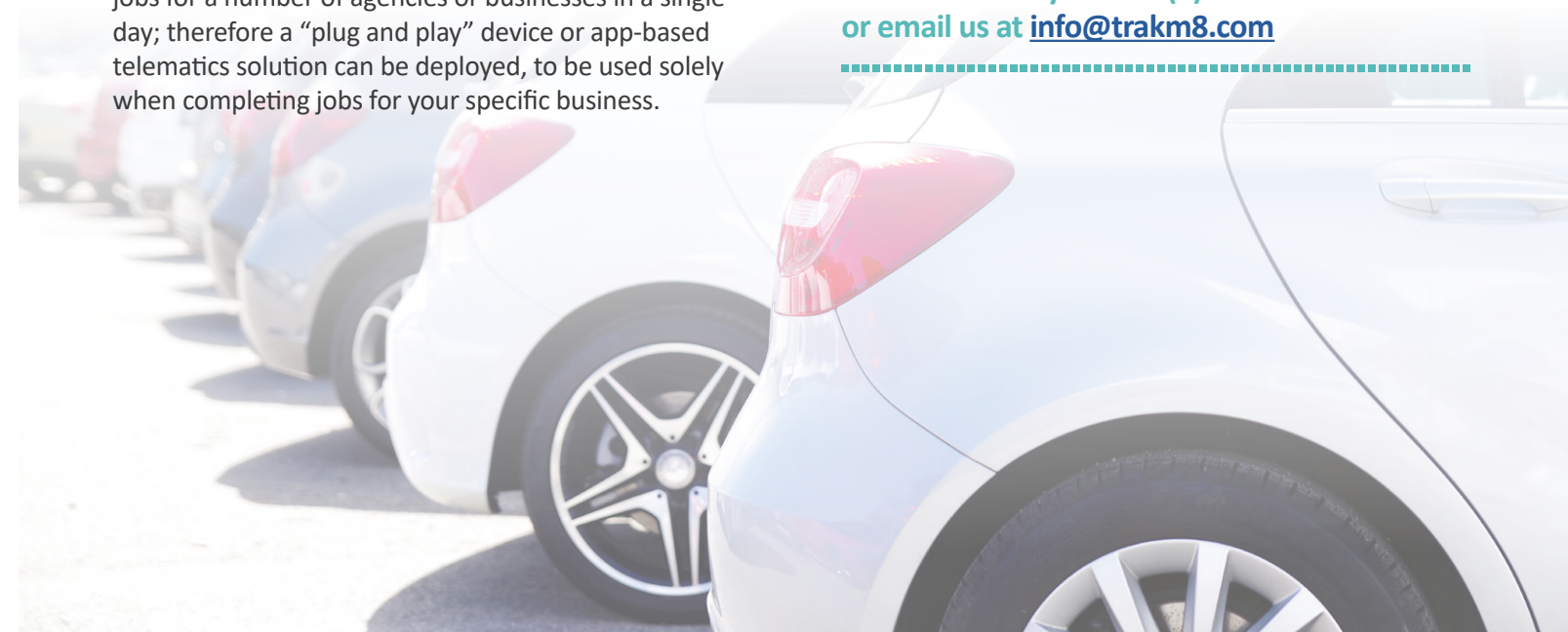
Individuals that use their own vehicles for work are referred to as 'grey fleet' drivers. In relation to field marketing, tactical and non-permanent staff are likely to fall within this category. Many organisations provide these drivers with the option of taking a cash allowance, or fuel expenses, instead of a company car - but from a risk perspective, companies are just as responsible for these employees as they are for those in company cars.

Enforcement for grey fleet can be slightly trickier - and questions around privacy may arise from drivers. By including HR and legal teams early in the process, any issues surrounding data protection can be resolved. Any telematics provider worth their salt will also be able to allay any concerns surrounding data privacy and provide businesses and drivers with processes and policies to ensure their personal data isn't compromised in any way.

Ensuring that employees realise the benefits telematics can bring to them as well as the company is vital to the success of the scheme; this can be achieved through regular and transparent communication to drivers. It may be that some drivers are completing jobs for a number of agencies or businesses in a single day; therefore a "plug and play" device or app-based telematics solution can be deployed, to be used solely when completing jobs for your specific business.



If you employ field-based workers and would like more information on Trakm8's telematics, route optimisation or camera solutions, contact us today on +44 (0) 330 311 5157 or email us at info@trakm8.com





Trakm8

Data driven insights

Trakm8 Limited

4 Roman Park, Roman Way, Coleshill,
West Midlands, B46 1HG

Call: +44 (0) 330 311 5157

Email: info@trakm8.com

Web: www.trakm8.com