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Joe Gossage

Windows on workshops

As the DVSA’s earned recognition scheme gets underway, workshop systems may rise up operators’ business agendas. And not just for the efficiency improvements they offer. Steve Banner explains

Fancy the idea of enforcement officers from the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency being able to nose around your workshop records without leaving their desks? Such a facility looks set to be available from next autumn under the DVSA’s planned ‘earned recognition’ scheme. And it is by no means bad news.

It’s all about enabling reputable operators to open up their vehicle and driver data to remote scrutiny over secure internet links. Assuming nothing is found amiss, such co-operation should mean their trucks are less likely to be subjected to roadside checks. Equally, it gives DVSA officers more time to target the seriously non-compliant.

The move goes hand-in-hand with workshops’ increasing uptake of web-based maintenance systems, such as that offered by r2c Online. Why this trend? Construction operator Mick George says it all. Transport manager Joe Gossage calculates that moving to the latter system to manage maintenance on its 260-strong truck fleet is saving 70 hours of administration time every week.

“We used to have a massive amount of paperwork,” he recalls. “Inspection sheets, driver pre-use checks, wall

planners... Everything we did was manually-generated. Not only did that mean an unsustainable amount of time spent on administration, but it also opened the door to errors, such as incorrectly completed inspection sheets or missing documentation.”

Most importantly, though, Gossage reckons the time saved is now being spent on a more proactive approach to fleet maintenance. “The workshop creates a digital inspection sheet that, when completed, is uploaded directly to the cloud-hosted asset file,” he explains. “That means we can use this single system to track the status of any vehicle, retrieve inspections, see next inspection dates and track work in progress.”

REAL-TIME REVOLUTION

Comparing this to the old processes, he says, for example, that drivers used to generate more than 500 sheets of paper per day, including pre- and post-use defect reports. All of these had to be manually checked by the transport office and any findings acted on.

“These days, drivers complete their daily checks using their mobile phones and the information is uploaded to the system in real time,” says Gossage. “At the click of a button we can use the system to address the defect as



required. That can mean either booking the work in or assigning it to the next scheduled service date. It gives us full traceability of our defect management and is entirely paperless.”

But r2c Online is not the only such system: ASC Software, based in Ireland, recently launched Assetminder, its cloud-based fleet maintenance solution. Marketing manager Graham McCarthy says it’s scalable for small and large workshops alike, with menu pricing.

“For example, we’re talking in terms of £59 per month per vehicle if you want to do things such as plan scheduled services and statutory inspections,” he says. “Then it’s £13 a month if you want to manage fitters and clock them on and off, and £3 per month per vehicle for daily inspections.” Assetminder can also be used with tablets and PCs – and, again, there is no paperwork. “We’re happy for operators to try it for a month without any obligation,” adds McCarthy.

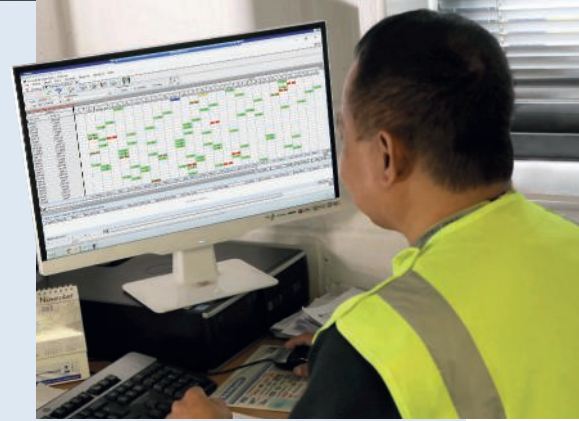
What about the many freight operators whose workshops service



Workshop accreditation

Whatever workshop management system you run, truck and van maintenance organisations wanting to attract more third party fleet work should consider going for IRTE Workshop Accreditation. Certification gives third party operators confidence in the knowledge that they have achieved independent verification to the standard and, as such, can be trusted.

That's important - particularly given that operators remain responsible for their own O licence undertakings, not workshops, even if the latter's incompetence results in an 'S' marked prohibition at the



roadside. Valid for three years, Workshop Accreditation entails a day-long audit by FTA (Freight Transport Association) auditors who look at everything from equipment calibration certificates to staff training records. Sound advice.

trucks operated by third parties - such as small hauliers based on nearby industrial estates with three or four vehicles apiece? Then workshop software has to ensure that each is invoiced correctly once jobs have been completed, and the usual documentation provided promptly. This is where companies such as Freeway Fleet Systems score, with its package that can hold details of third party trucks as well as the operator's own.

This system automatically emails external operators to tell them when trucks are due for routine maintenance and statutory inspections. Once jobs are complete, it generates invoices from the job cards and updates accounting software, eliminating the need for data to be entered manually.

Incidentally, Freeway also works with existing software covering other aspects of an organisation's business, according to Vlad Costache, general manager of TT Express. For example, the system has happily integrated with this Oldham-

based warehousing and distribution firm's Manpack3 transport management system, from Mandata. "It automatically updates vehicle status," he says, adding that traffic planners now know which trucks and trailers are available for use, as well as which are due for a service and when.

Similarly, Suffolk-based Bartrum Group has also integrated Freeway with Mandata. One advantage, says chief engineer David Bumfrey, is that this provides the company with useful audit trails. "Whether it's a vehicle or just a spare part, we can track it back to its origin and view its entire history," he explains.

Interestingly, the advent of DVSA's earned recognition scheme and the benefits likely to follow, may trigger some transport companies to update their workshop software. That's certainly how Jaama managing director Martin Evans sees the near future. His company offers Key2, as exhibited at the Commercial Vehicle Show back in April.

Web-based, it can be used to manage drivers, vehicles and workshops.

"We received enquiries from operators running anything from several thousand vehicles to just a handful," asserts Evans. "The common theme throughout was that they wanted to modernise their methods. Some transport managers continue to use spreadsheets while others employ outdated systems that have been updated with bolt-on solutions to the point where they are no longer fit for purpose."

One advantage of Key2, says Evans, is it can be used by major logistics operators running several workshops in order to manage compliance centrally. "At some locations, the local workshop manager may be on top of things, but that may not be the case at others," he observes. "In that situation, centralisation can lead to increased consistency."

And consistently high standard across entire operations is something DVSA sees as fundamental. **TE**