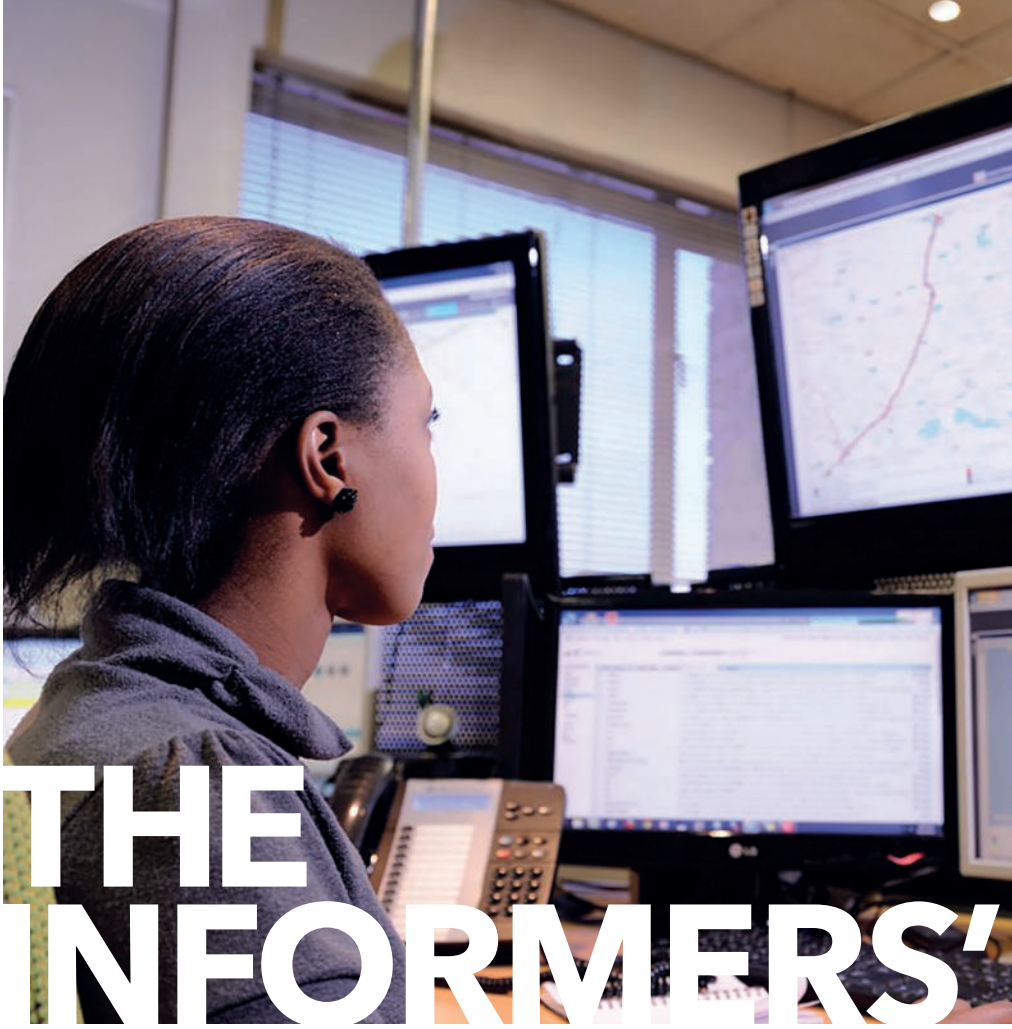


THE NEORMERS'

Telematics systems now deliver the kind of fleet management facilities operators once could only dream of. But are most trying to do too much too soon? Brian Weatherley investigates

Put any group of telematics users together and someone will say: 'I don't have time to look at all the data.' Are operators getting too much information? Or should they be devoting more resources to analysing it? Indeed, should they be considering some of the more recent additions – systems and services – that improve the context and speed of vehicle and driver data?

According to MiX Telematics managing director Marc Trollet, the first mistake people make is trying to roll out everything at once. "You need to focus on one step at a time," he advises, citing driver behaviour as one possible target. "After you get that return on investment, then focus on what else you can do."

But there's more. "The biggest reason systems aren't delivering on ROI is training," reckons Trollet. And for those who think that can be covered by a webinar he is unequivocal. While there are obvious cost implications, users must invest in continuous training, he insists – and not only to accommodate staff changes in the traffic office.

A recent study by MiX into its support hotline proves the point. It found that among large fleet users 50% of calls were due to inadequate training. Among MiX's responses is the offer of a support team member in the customer's traffic office on short-term contract.

However, it's not just about project scope and training. Would-be telematics buyers have choices, ranging from driver management, and routing and scheduling to real-time road risk management via on-board video cameras. So what are the must-haves?

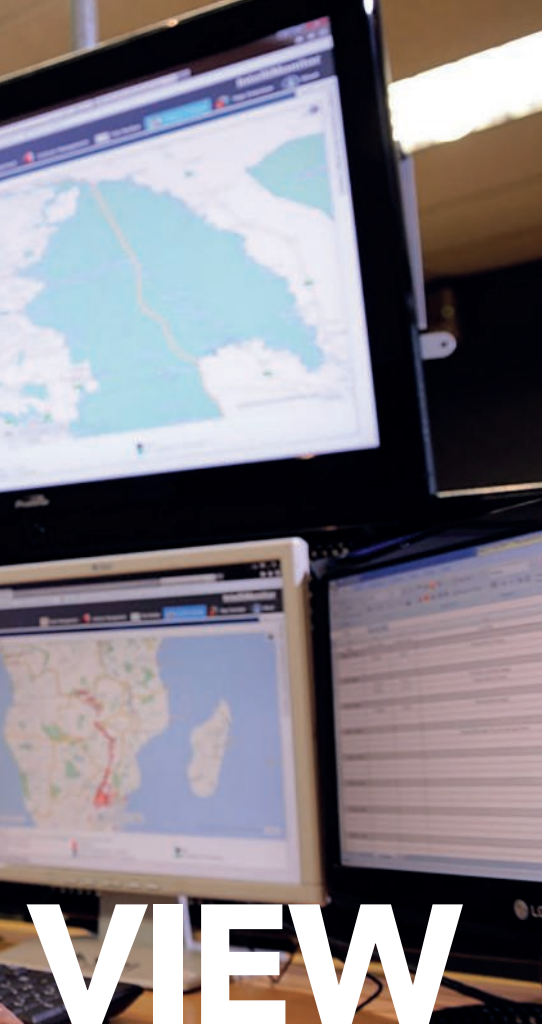
While acknowledging that all fleets are different, competitor Microlise's product director Stephen Watson says, whatever they do, fleet operators need more than dots on a map. "They need data on fleet utilisation and driver performance without having to analyse mountains of data." That, he says, is how to effect efficiency gains previously out of reach.

At the last count Microlise had 201,238 live connections globally. Regular enquiries to the company concern collaboration, safety, and risk and compliance. "All of which we see as key areas for Microlise," notes Watson, adding that the firm aims to make its telematics products as intuitive as possible. "We also have a benefits realisation team that works closely with customers to help them maximise ROI. They help train system users, review how new technology might be used and recommend how further benefits can be achieved."

WHO TO TURN TO

Microlise also runs customer advisory boards with members drawn from organisations across industry sectors. These provide feedback while also helping to identify trends and pain points. "From these sessions Microlise is able to adjust and refine its product roadmaps," explains Watson.

Convinced? So who might you turn to? While chassis manufacturers have embraced telematics – some offering their own systems – third party providers remain major players. "Five years ago we were afraid the OEMs would kill the



"You need to focus on one step at a time. After you get that return on investment, then focus on what else you can do"
Marc Trollet

aftermarket... Well it's not happening," says MiX's Trollet. For him, that is in part because mixed fleets can't always get what they need from a single OEM. Hardly surprising then that some OEMs teamed up with third party providers – Microlise and DAF being an example.

But there are others. As demand grows for fleet information, some component suppliers have joined the ranks. Michelin's Effitrailer is one such, featuring an on-board datalink, as well as TPMS (tyre pressure monitoring system) and EBS (electronic braking system) data analysis. Effitrailer data is accessed via a web portal, providing details on trailer location, mileage, and tyre pressures and temperatures. It also reveals abnormal downtime periods, as well as 'wait-time', 'unhooked' or 'towed' status and whether the trailer is overloaded. And it can flag up harsh braking.

Using Effitrailer, fleets can take a proactive approach to tyre maintenance and replacement, potentially cutting downtime. Furthermore, Michelin promises to reduce tyre-related trailer breakdowns by up to 50%.

Gist recently adopted that system for 58 tri-axle Gray & Adams double-decker trailers on long-distance trunking routes. Gist engineering director Sam de Beaux describes the system as "the first important step on the road to predictive, rather than reactive, maintenance for commercial fleets".

What's the future for telematics? William Salter, managing director of Paragon, believes software advances and integration with other systems, such as routing and scheduling, will drive further improvements.

"Operators can already plan their transport requirements and then compare what is happening on the day," he says. "This visibility helps to mitigate problems, avoiding unnecessary costs and poor service delivery." But by analysing historical data, planners could also spot routes incurring the highest excess mileage or driver hours. They might also see which customer sites regularly keep drivers waiting, causing added cost and knock-on late deliveries.

DASHCAM POWER

And then there are on-board cameras. "The ability to combine telematics with 3G cameras gives operators the opportunity to gain a detailed understanding of driver safety," argues Justin White, managing director of Intelligent Telematics. "Together, they help provide a complete picture of how vehicles are being operated – by capturing both driver behaviour data and video footage of collisions, near-misses and harsh driving events."

White makes the point that video clips help operators to fully understand contributory factors. "These enable them to implement or support driver performance and training programmes. Our Safety League Table also uses GPS, accelerometer and video data to help rank drivers."

Meanwhile, Lytx, which runs the DriveCam programme, provides a valuable data review service. "What we're looking for is potentially risky driving," says Damian Penney, Lytx vice president and European general manager, explaining that his people review and score video clips for risk. "We then provide the incident clips to our customers who can coach their drivers on what they should be doing – or say 'Well done for preventing a collision'."

Penney also highlights a trend away from SD (flash-memory) cards towards transmitting camera data in real time via telematics. The benefit: "Some of the riskiest behaviours don't lead to a collision, so you don't go to the SD card and never know about them."

With this system, though, in the event of any harsh braking, DriveCam uploads a 12-second clip – eight before and four afterwards – and the data is available within five minutes. DriveCam's monitors then determine how risky each event was and provide feedback within 24 hours. So nothing is missed.

"We'll say that was very risky and you need to do something now, or you can deal with it later," explains Penney. And he adds that operators can deal immediately with insurance companies, or embark on targeted coaching. TE