

# Support behind the scenes

The solution to a problem starts with a phone call. That's the case for tyre fleet management, and for truck service contracts. From a driver stuck with a blowout on the side of the road to a depot manager looking to fix a stuck brake, when customers are in need, the first call goes to service contract suppliers. But with new technology and an evolving business landscape, it would appear that their position may be about to change.

The companies interviewed for this article share a similar basic support structure: a call centre, a network of nationwide dealers, and some kind of shared database system that links the two together.

Bandvulc's tyre service operation relies on 40 independent service providers around the UK, whose combined fleet exceeds 2,000 vans, which it claims is the biggest tyre maintenance fleet in the UK. Commercial director Phil West states that, as "speed is the new currency," its 24-hour call

**Roadside assistance services for trucks and truck components are evolving to keep pace with the trucks that they cover. Will Dalrymple looks at the changing world of technical fleet management systems**

helpline based in Plymouth, Devon is answered within six seconds. The customer's fleet list flashes up on the screen, where the operator can check the vehicle's specification and history (and which for example prevents a tyre being changed if it was changed yesterday) as well as customer preferences. And then the operator gets in touch with the nearest dealer.

A feature of the company's bespoke 'Galahad' call logging system is that it transfers the entire job details electronically, rather than forcing the operator to explain the situation verbally. After a quick electronic confirmation, the service agent sends help (average response times: 63 minutes). The system continues to track the job until it is completed, flashing up amber on the operator's screen once resolution takes longer than 60 minutes.

The company, which was bought by Continental in 2016, continues to evolve. New for

2018 is updated service van tracking technology. Rather than requiring a verbal check with technicians about their estimated time of arrival, the new system will feature live tracking of the service van to provide automated, Uber-style updates.

In a consolidating market (for example, family business Tructyre was bought by Michelin in October 2017), Bandvulc is now looking to expand the scope of its service. West states: "The biggest emerging part of the business is the management company. Whether it's new tracking technology or other solutions and systems, we want to offer so much more than just tyres." The drive here is to provide better customer service. Or, as West states, "so a customer doesn't have to ring a number for windscreens, a number for this, a number for that". He says that the first product extensions beyond tyres will target windscreens and mirrors, in a development project starting in 2018. To do so, Bandvulc would partner with



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Paul McDonald



other service providers specialising in those particular areas.

Mercedes-Benz also sees changes in customer demand for its S24 breakdown service. Paul McDonald, service contracts and S24 manager, sees a shift toward non-breakdown-related issues, such as broken wing mirrors, since the 24-hour service provides a faster response than booking a workshop visit.

New Mercedes-Benz truck warranties cover S24, as are vehicles in the brand’s comprehensive service contract, which include wear and tear, but not damage items, points out McDonald. (Roadside assistance – average wait time under one hour – is also available for older vehicles without service contracts on a case-by-case basis.)

Damage to truck bodywork may require specialist skills and equipment to put right. Offering to manage repairs once an accident has happened, from first notification of loss through to final invoicing, is Selsia, whose Selsia Central management portal connects a network of 180 body repairers around the country, 40 of which specialise in heavy commercial vehicles.

Explains marketing manager Neil Marcus: “Body repair is still very artisanal; no two accidents are the same. We bring standardisation to the process. Before, fleet managers might have been arranging repairs individually, paying different prices, using different parts discounts. We’ll go in and set up a standard SLA that includes those issues. Repairers agree to those; we negotiate them on their behalf.” Selsia makes its money through a fee per repair sent; fleets, in fact, are entitled to use the service for free.

Another aspect of service is preventing the accident from happening in the first place. Bandvulc, for example, provides videos, brochures, maintenance sheets and training information to clients, as

well as a paperless document service.

For Goodyear, in addition to its TruckForce recovery operation, the ‘Fleetcheck’ service provides regular technician visits to depots to check tyres and tyre pressures.

**AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION**

Nigel Sowerby, TruckForce EU network director, states: “From the point of view of proactive services, we are trying to sell fewer tyres to more fleets. The job is to sell less, to reduce the bill, and to reduce downtime.” Launched in 2005, TruckForce now has 13 regional administration and operations centres running 165 mobile vans, supported by another 40 independent service providers operating 1,000 vans. Average response time: 70 minutes.

ATS Euromaster offers a similar service, MasterCARE fleet inspection, which is said to be able to improve tyre performance and minimise related downtime. Street cleaning and recycling business Kier Services recently signed with ATS Euromaster for tyre supply and management for its 214-strong fleet (pictured, p21). The deal replaces Kier’s previous contract with local independent tyre dealers.

As vehicles find their own voice, repair services are changing.

Goodyear has integrated TPMS data into UK recovery operations for a year now, and to date has 20 customers and 3,500 vehicles in the UK. It also offers TPMS fitment as well as tracking services. Sowerby explains: “TruckForce’s Proactive Services [business] will install sensors, and connect the electrics to the vehicle black box. And then if there is a high temperature warning, or low pressure warning, we’ll be made aware of that and send a van to solve that before the tyre causes an accident.” He calls it ‘proactive breakdown recovery’. (Bandvulc, in cooperation with corporate parent Continental, is starting a project to develop a real-time, in-house TPMS monitoring service this year.)

Similar benefits from other data sources are emerging at Mercedes-Benz as well. Its newest service offering, Uptime, trialled in 2017 with three fleets, adds the vehicle’s signals and interprets them as service tasks. Uptime then sends messages to the customer – to top up engine coolant, for example. And it transmits technical data, such as brake pad thickness, to the dealer, so it can plan maintenance intervals and prepare for the next service. Finally, based on information it has recorded, it also can start to predict the risk of breakdowns. If it thinks that one is imminent, it sends a message to the call centre, which can alert the customer, or a dealer to take immediate action, before the truck actually stops. (Uptime is only available with post-March 2017 Arocs, Actros and Antros models.)

So connected trucks should reduce the demand for pure breakdown services. McDonald concludes: “As more and more information becomes available, more situations become predictable through that system, and fewer and fewer breakdown scenarios are handled in the traditional way.” **TE**

