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Wish you were there

As this year's preview tells, only one of the big seven truck OEMs has its own CV Show stand (see pp25-38). Some of them might be holding back their new model for launch at the main European event this year, IAA, which features its biennial focus on commercial vehicles. Without it, investment in a big stand in the centre of the hall might be difficult to justify.

But that doesn't make a visit to this year's show any less necessary. Rather, it reflects the fact that the truck itself is only part of the bigger picture for a fleet engineer.

The real differentiating factor for truck operators is about marshalling the latest productivity tools to manage the asset extremely efficiently, for greater profitability. That takes in fleet management, telematics, systems optimisation and maintenance planning. It's about digital connectivity, data in the cloud, and possibly a degree of automation. It might also include TPMS, or ADAS systems such as predictive cruise control. It probably requires dealing with big data: interpreting and acting on the information shuttling around behind the display screen generated by sensors in truck-mounted black plastic boxes.

In other words, there is nearly as much to manage in the hardware and software that live behind the dash display (and in server farms around the world) as there is in heavy metal. I predict that the balance between steel and silicon will continue to shift. In the future, the importance of the physical truck will fade into the background as it becomes a generic commodity. At the same time, OEMs will compete ever more fiercely over hardware and software that live somewhere on the vehicle and in 'the cloud'.

While of course truck OEMs are driving development of those computer-based management systems, they are not the only ones. Third party suppliers have a role to play, too; and, fortunately, many of them will be exhibiting at the NEC, ranging from telematics suppliers to fleet management software, driver safety systems, as well as other kinds of consumables and accessories. And this magazine, the IRTE and organisational parent SOE will also be represented, on stand 5G40.

I hope to see you there.

Will Dalrymple
Editor