



Wipe out paperwork

Workshop operations were once famed for producing nearly as much paperwork as they did oily waste.

Inspection and defect sheets came in, while job cards complete with the obligatory greasy thumbprints were generated, and then translated into internal or external invoices, and service records were updated and stamped.

The whole system was vulnerable to pieces of paper being lost or spoiled, with jobs sometimes being duplicated or forgotten. Then there was the nightmare of the VOSA (now DVSA) inspection, where some attempt had to be made to reconcile maintenance planning schedules and wallplanners with paperwork relating to what had actually been done. A driver's inspection sheet had to be generated every day a vehicle was used, and then kept on file for up to 15 months, with the

The introduction of IT systems to the workshop environment means that, for many operators, the only paper you'll find in the garage is for wiping dipsticks, reports Richard Simpson

rectification of every defect noted.

Many companies continued with paper-based workshop systems long after all other aspects of the business had been recorded electronically, possibly for at least a subconscious feeling that oily-fingered, spanner-swinging mechanics were not to be trusted with computers.

This was, of course, a totally misplaced prejudice. Modern vehicles themselves contain more computer processing power than the average company office, and anyone working on them is required to be proficient

in managing electronic diagnosis and rectification. Vehicle technicians are generally far more at home with keyboards and screens than they are with pens and paper.

Most of today's technicians are also far happier using a virtual workshop manual on a ruggedised tablet than they are trying to keep the pages of a paper version clean while up to their wrists in grease and oil.

While actual uptake has been fairly small so far, there is little doubt that the introduction of the Earned Recognition scheme by DVSA has driven the introduction of integrated IT into the workshop (see box). The other great enabler has been the widespread public acceptance of the smartphone as an all-purpose tool for work and leisure.

Drivers' daily checks play a key role in maintaining a fleet in roadworthy condition. But a paper-based system could easily create a mass of inconsistent

EARNED RECOGNITION FORCES A CHANGE

DVSA Earned Recognition relies on operators installing a system that will monitor their compliance against a set of key performance indicators – and automatically report any exceptions directly to the DVSA’s inspectors every four weeks. Crucially, these failings can be viewed and in many cases addressed by the operator before the notification is sent. And because the reports can be assessed by the agency online, there’s less need to stop trucks for roadside checks.

Earned Recognition can only be achieved by operators who are prepared to allow DVSA to be alerted in this manner by using a validated digital system to monitor both vehicle maintenance and drivers’ hours. These systems and processes must be approved on application and then every two years by using an approved auditor.

As of mid-November, there are 82 approved operators (<https://is.gd/iwulem>), 18 auditors (<https://is.gd/1nyaGe>) and 27 IT providers (<https://is.gd/ocesuc>).

Operators with Earned Recognition can also use their status as a marketing tool: a list of operators with Earned Recognition is published by DVSA, and the Earned Recognition marque can also be used on company websites, emails, stationery and display materials (but not on vehicles, signage for premises, or staff uniforms or IDs).

and incomplete paperwork in the form of defect sheets. Even with a truck on day work, systems can be riddled with functional flaws. The driver was expected to produce evidence of completed checks if stopped at the roadside, and yet the same evidence was also needed to be held on file in the office. Carbon sheets and multiple copies of the same document are the harbingers of inefficiency, meaning that jobs can be flagged up twice or not at all.

A number of systems now on the market offer smartphone apps for drivers to use to undertake daily checks in place

of paper forms. They allow check results to be logged direct to the office, even when the vehicle is away from base, and there is no need for office staff to wait for paper forms to be handed in before deciding what action needs to be taken over faults. An added bonus is that drivers can photograph potentially faulty components such as damaged tyres, and send the images back to the office for a second opinion. The app will also record the actual time taken to complete the check, as well as the time, date and place where it was done. Drivers are no longer tempted to press on without

doing proper checks all week, and then stop to complete a nice set of paperwork five minutes before they get back to the yard on a Friday night.

For example, the fleet maintenance system developed by Freeway starts the driver’s daily check with a series of structured questions appearing on a smartphone screen. This follows through a series of stages, including the engineer’s inspection, the creation of an electronic job card, and then an electronic timesheet on which operatives can record all productive work done.

Parts needed can be ordered and checked against stores stock, and authorised staff can reorder items as required.

Performance can be measured against a KPI dashboard. Customers include Reading Buses, Elldis, Suttons, Fergusons and Gregory.

Tyre company Bridgestone has recently launched FleetPulse, a three-in-one solution composed of a mobile app, a centralised website and tyre pressure monitoring system (TPMS) hardware. FleetPulse is claimed to be the only solution on the market combining vehicle checks, booking services, fleet management and TPMS in a single platform, all while enabling real-time communication between drivers, technicians and fleet managers via the cloud. FleetPulse (pictured, p12) can be

CASE STUDY: PAPERLESS WORKSHOP DIAGNOSTICS FOR FIRST BUS

First Bus, one of the UK’s largest bus operators, has signed a deal with Eclipse for a single diagnostic platform for its workshops.

The operator trialled several options before deciding that one generic diagnostic platform would not only reduce costs, but would also improve efficiencies and vehicle availability across its fleet. It chose the Jaltest Eclipse Testpad Extreme system, which is a ruggedised 10-inch workshop tablet

PC featuring Jaltest Link multiplexer and Bluetooth 4.

“We have been working with Eclipse over the last year to develop a system that will benefit our dedicated team of engineers,” says Ian Warr, First Bus engineering director.

“The trials we conducted demonstrated the capability of the system, as well as the additional support provided. We are confident that through training, familiarity and the

use of only one diagnostic system, First Bus engineers will increasingly maximise the use of Jaltest and progressively reduce the spend on third party labour for assistance with diagnostics, and increase the fleet availability.”

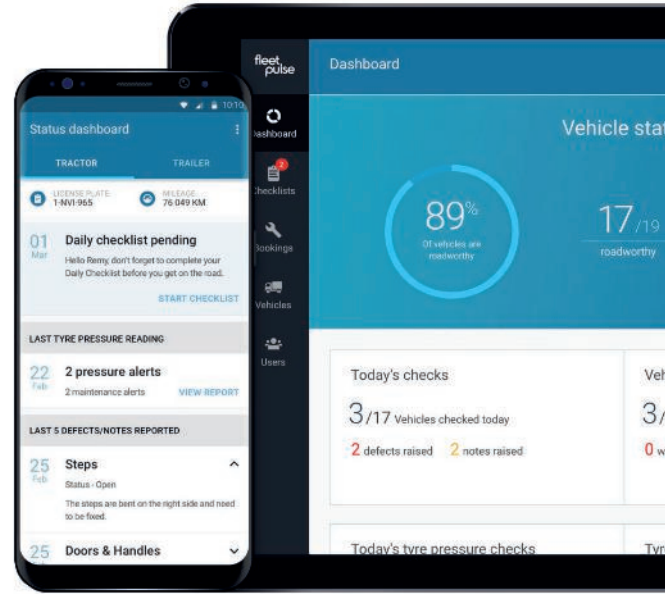
For the contract, Jaltest will supply 48 Eclipse systems across the First Bus network, replacing multiple diagnostic products previously used.


used anytime, by any driver, across all tyre brands, and is available on Android devices.

Bridgestone argues that, with 30% of roadside breakdowns being caused by low tyre pressure, pressure monitoring has a key role to play in ensuring reliability. It also reduces running costs: 90% of punctures are caused by running tyres at too low a pressure, and under-inflated tyres wear out faster and increase fuel consumption.

One company that has been driven towards a paperless workshop by aspirations to achieve Earned Recognition is Beamish Transport, a vehicle logistics business based near Newcastle. Beamish runs a fleet of 50 trucks on car and caravan transporter duties. All but one are 6x2 tractors -

mostly from DAF and Volvo - which work with trailers by Transporter Engineering, Rolfo and Belle. The trucks are maintained in-house by service manager Jordan Sharpe and his team of eight technicians working across two shifts, using a system called Truckfile. He reports: "We've been using Truckfile for just over three months now and it's already become an indispensable part of everything we do. We decided to invest in the technology because we wanted to get on the Earned Recognition scheme. To do that, we needed a reliable method of digital recordkeeping that was also going to be easy to use.



"Truckfile fits the bill perfectly. Even some of our older guys, who were not used to working with computers, have taken to it really easily. The system is very intuitive to use, and just makes everyone's lives so much easier. It's quick, clean and there's never any worry about bits of paper going missing." 



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