



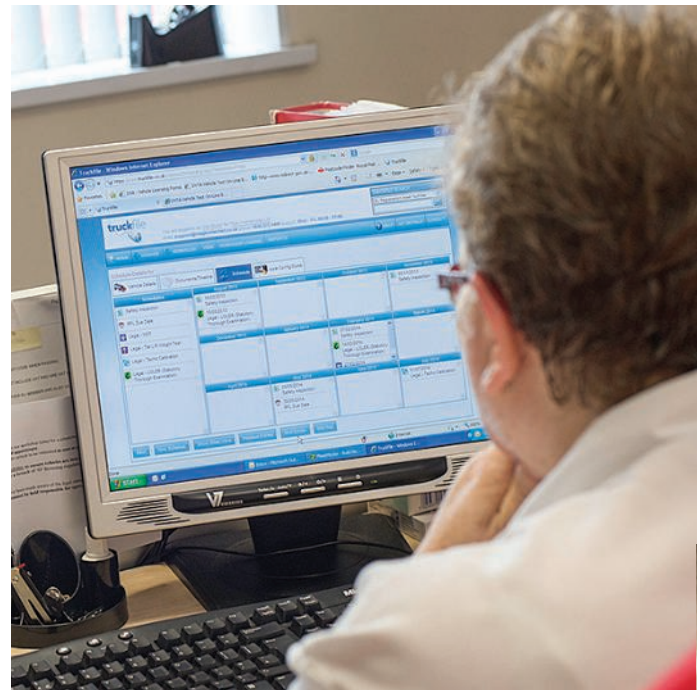
# Efficiency

**Modern workshop management systems promise to transform workshop efficiency and flexibility, as well as technician quality and productivity – but what should you look for? Toby Clark reports**

In a complex fleet operation, order is vital: timely inspection, maintenance and repairs are key to compliance and efficiency. Workshop management systems (WMS) promise to help, improving performance, while lowering costs.

These systems vary in character: many are simply workshop systems, while some are components of dealer management systems (DMS), fleet management or asset management packages. But whatever the approach, it has to work with your other systems: accounting software; scheduling or diary systems, such as Outlook; external databases of parts, vehicles and customers; and, in some cases, telematics and diagnostics systems.

Scheduling inspections and servicing can be



## PYE Commercials (Preston)

PYE Commercials (Preston) is a CV repairer and MOT centre. Managing director David Rogerson is convinced that a WMS – in his case, Garage Data Systems' GDS – has improved productivity and made documentation easier. Originally, PYE used a Sage accounting package, but added GDS a couple of years ago. "It's quite comprehensive," he says. "It deals with technicians' times, and it produces job sheets, updates your stock and produces a sales invoice. It keeps a good track on everything."

Rogerson finds scheduling particularly useful. "You can put in five or six criteria, so you can take a customer's vehicle and predict all future inspections, servicing and MOTs, and there's a booking-in system so you know which vehicles are in the garage at any one time, and how long they've been there."

The system has other ways to assess productivity, too. "You can see how a technician's time has been allocated, and how much has been charged to each technician. And you can check stock levels and monitor the mark-ups on your purchases."

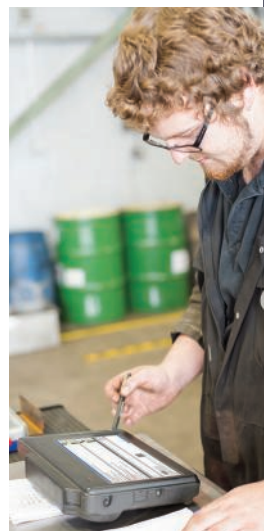
GDS is connected directly to Sage, avoiding duplication, and Rogerson says it was reasonably straightforward to get up and running. "As with any system, there's a planning stage and all the work in setting up, but we had the invoicing and jobsheets ready in two or three weeks. Stock control can take a while – you've got to plan that, to get the categories right – so it took a couple of months to get that ready."

complex. As Neil Stewart, managing director of Garage Data Systems (GDS), puts it: "Reminders are quite critical. Our system understands the difference between a truck and a trailer – and a trailer could be a box, a flatbed, a fridge or anything."

GDS also features LOLER (Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations) scheduling and vehicle registration look-up, but, like other systems, it also lets the operator set criteria to define service and inspection intervals. It then sends diary reminders or emails to let operators and drivers know.

Some suppliers also suggest that evidence- and condition-based monitoring systems – using telematics and diagnostics – are on their way.

WMSs often feature asset management – or at least stock control for parts and consumables. Some can import an electronic parts file (EPF) from a manufacturer or supplier, and may automatically create and email purchase orders. Others now have links to insurance tools, such as Audatex, to send and



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approve estimates. As Paul Clarke, director of Truckfile, says: “E-procurement will be huge, with automatic authorisation direct from the workshop.”

Some systems are locally-based, installed on the operator’s own PC server: examples include GDS and TRACE. Renault Trucks’ DMS is also server-based – ‘a decentralised system’, as the OEM describes it. Understandably, Renault’s 40 UK dealerships are often competitors, so are wary of data being leaked or benchmarked.

### Web delivery

Other WMSs are web-based: Truckfile, for instance, is ‘guaranteed’ to be available 24/7. “Software as a Service [SaaS] systems are the future, they but have to be secure,” warns Clarke. A halfway house is also possible: having the package hosted by the software provider or a third party on a dedicated or virtual

round check that travels through the process, automatically creating a job sheet. This is becoming essential as compliance regulation pushes towards proof of defect rectification.” Some packages use PDAs or apps to simplify this aspect, verifying and transmitting information automatically.

WMS reporting functions can also be used to rank technicians, in terms of average job length or other criteria, but Kyle Testo, of United Biscuits, warns that such efficiency calculations can be misleading. “That doesn’t always work for our organisation [where technicians are responsible both for inspection and rectification], but it would for larger outfits, where jobs can be split between technicians.”

At the end of the day, as Truckfile’s Clarke says: “It’s not the technology that makes the money: it’s making the guy with the spanner in his hand more effective that makes the money.” **TE**

*For more information, see: <http://bit.ly/vosa>*



## United Biscuits Distribution Services

Kyle Testo is vehicle maintenance unit manager for United Biscuits Distribution Services, in Ashby, with a workshop of six technicians and an administrator to take care of 50 tractors and around 150 trailers. As he puts it: “We do a hell of a lot of work to a high standard.”

Testo uses Truckfile and says: “It takes time [to maintain the system] but it saves time in other critical areas.” He suggests implementation can be done step by step. “You can start using it in the first week and build on that.” He lists the stages as: putting vehicles into the system; transferring the paper maintenance schedule; inputting parts; and adding technicians (“a five-minute job”). Parts entry was manual: “We already had the information and we can delete and amend parts.”

Once those stages are complete, the system can generate a maintenance schedule. Testo works on a weekly cycle: “You could do it for the whole year, but that would give each technician too many jobs to choose from.” Technicians then access the system through two touchscreen PCs in the workshop. “I really like it being a cloud system. I can be in meetings all day, but I can log on and see what’s going on.”

Testo agrees you could get a WMS just to become paperless, but adds that using it for cost data, too, makes sense. “There are a lot of systems that just replace job cards, whereas this has the potential to replace financial systems. We’ve developed a cost-centre model: you put labour rates in – internal or external – and, once the technician logs on, that sets the time going. Any parts booked out generate a cost.

“Everything goes through Truckfile. We’ve fine-tuned it to produce reports. It makes things a lot easier at period end. At the click of a button you’ve got full cost or vehicle history reporting. I wouldn’t say it’s a labour-saving tool, but it gives you ultimate visibility, and in this day and age that’s important, in terms of compliance.”

server. GDS includes a back-up service with the package, so that data is auto-copied from the operator’s server to a remote location.

Costs vary widely: GDS typically charges £1,500 for set-up plus £90 per month for a four-user system, while a full-blown DMS can start at £50,000. Rental is another option, with Distinctive Systems’ Vehicle Maintenance System starting at £97.50 per month.

Whatever the system, though, managing change is vital. “Our system is designed so the transition from paper or a legacy system is easy,” comments Clarke. “Using a touchscreen, PC or tablet, it presents jobs in a familiar jobsheet style. The difference is all work is legible, everything has to be completed, and it can be timed from start to finish.”

And he adds: “The system can automate workflow: a driver can report a defect on the walk-