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Service with a smile, or contractual obligation

Apparently, truck manufacturers should be leading the charge to road haulage 'servitization' - an Americanism meaning nothing more fancy than adding complementary services to products. That gem was among recommendations in a paper published at the recent technology conference organised by telematics firm Microlise.

Des Evans, former CEO of MAN and now honorary professor at the Aston Centre for Servitization Research and Practice, was among those making the case for OEMs to price systems and services - such as driver and vehicle performance monitoring, and route optimisation - not around menu options, but as risk-reward contracts.

However, the paper 'Delivering Growth: Servitization within the Road Transport Industry' also calls for operators and government to step up to the plate. If the former ran cost-benefit analyses, goes its argument, they would see the potential for profit far outweighs the price. As for the latter, unsurprisingly the authors add their voices to the clamour for industry-advancing financial incentives.

Well and good, but, with the Conservative administration's clear mandate to redouble its commitment to austerity, incentives will be few and far between. The Department for Transport may well be persuaded to smile on justifiable priorities, such as training much-needed professional drivers and encouraging operators to switch to greener vehicles (page 12). It is unlikely to spend scarce taxpayers' money on making telematics more attractive, particularly given its history of clear and rapid payback (page 28).

As for convincing operators and truck OEMs to get on board, that's all about building confidence. Which is why investment decisions so often stand or fall on the experience of others. And also why September's IRTE Conference - with its user focus on technology and compliance - is so important. Visit www.irte-conference.co.uk.

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