

# AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE

Workshop management systems can improve garage efficiency and flexibility, but also operator compliance. Brian Tinham talks to fleet managers about getting it right

**M**odern systems can transform not only workshop efficiency and flexibility, but also technician productivity, as well as parts and warranty administration. So goes the mantra. And many software suppliers will add that users can also expect improvements in fleet efficiencies and compliance.

True or false? Well, if testimonials from hauliers, freight operators, CV hire firms, construction companies and their workshops large and small are anything to go by, they're mostly right. Look no further than the likes of Glanbia, John Hackling (Transport), LC Vehicle Hire, Owen Pugh, Ryder, SMH Fleet Solutions and Surefreight, all of which have implemented systems and are on record as happy customers.

Dairy processor Glanbia, for example, went for ASC Software's Fleetminder to manage its third party

workshops. That was back in 2012 and, since then, the system has built a record of all work on Glanbia's vehicles, where the maintenance or repair was done, parts fitted, time spent and the financials. It now also manages specialist equipment, ranging from fridge units to tyres.

The result: "Glanbia holds the most comprehensive vehicle history of any similar operation in Ireland, and not only meets the requirements of the Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Act, but exceeds it," boasts transport manager Eoghan O'Regan. "Additionally, we have seen substantial savings in parts through more effective control and better warranty claims management."

Similarly, haulier John Hackling improved its compliance management and administration, in its case by implementing Jaama's Key2 software. This operator, based in Bourton-on-the-Water, previously relied on a

spreadsheet system to manage vehicles, drivers, and service, maintenance and repair through its own workshops. However, according to transport manager Mark Salf, Key2 has "revolutionised" how the firm manages its fleet of 55 HGVs (mostly DAF and Volvo trucks) and eight Transit vans.

## HUGE EFFICIENCIES

"The volume of paperwork has reduced; documents can be scanned in and retained within the system; and we receive instant alerts when vehicle and driver checks are required," explains Salf. "From having a cumbersome, paper-based system, we are now using technology to ensure maximum compliance and drive operating efficiencies."

But there are three main caveats. First, choose your system supplier carefully and work with, not against, its representatives to maximise the benefits. Why? Because they've mostly seen it all

before and know what good looks like. Secondly, be realistic over timeframes for system implementation. This is rarely a five-minute task. And thirdly, don't neglect staff education and training. Failure to attend to this last point will scupper the best of workshop systems.

One operator that reckons it got its implementation spot on is LC Vehicle Hire, which 18 months ago went for r2c Online and completed rollout across all its six depots last October. Operations director Pat Graham (pictured) says the experience was excellent and the results likewise.

"We had expanded our depot coverage and were looking after around 2,000 vehicles - a mix ranging from 7.5 tonners up to 32- and 44-tonne trucks, but also specialist vehicles, such as gully emptiers, beavertail rigid and traffic management vehicles," he explains. "But, while our vehicle hire system was automated, we were managing maintenance and compliance manually."

That meant everything from scanning inspection sheets to physically entering





Photograph: Dean Smith

information, such as the kind of service due, and printing off job cards with the old tick lists for technicians. Choosing a system to bring efficiencies, however, necessitated thinking outside the box, he says.

#### DEVIL IN THE DETAIL

Partly, that was because the firm needed it to manage a range of vehicle types and marques, so a multi-function inspection sheet was required. Partly, LC also wanted the system to manage on-board equipment, including cranes and winches. And finally, any system would have to integrate with its Dataflair rental system.


What was Graham's approach? "We gave r2c Online a complete list of our fleet, including types and associated plant, and tasked our fleet controller Helen Cluderay with the job of training and rolling it out to our six depots," he says. "Now we have a suite of inspection sheets per vehicle, with the system handling the different periods required for inspection, etc, scheduling jobs and generating electronic sheets for technicians."

In a nutshell, Graham felt

able to trust the supplier. That said, his team took on much of the internal training, working with technicians, taking them through how to complete reports, from interacting with option lists to closing off jobs.

"The best thing about this process was that at no stage did r2c Online say, 'Right, we've sold you the system, so away you go,'" comments Graham. "They held our hands throughout and still do. We can phone if there's any kind of issue... It's never a problem."

As for the outcome, Graham says that administrators chasing technicians to sign off sheets is a thing of the past. And, once jobs are closed, PDFs can be automatically emailed to the customer for their compliance purposes. Management also has screen dashboards that show what's outstanding, reasons for delays, etc - meaning much better control.

"There are financial savings, although they're difficult to quantify," says Graham. "But there are also massive customer benefits because of the automation of their vehicle inspection and maintenance scheduling, and the compliance side." 



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