



TRACKING IN ACTION

UTILITIES AND PUBLIC SECTOR

How tracking can help the service sector through tough times

Tracking in utilities, public sector and facilities management is all about knowing where your mobile workers are at any given time. Having access to this real-time location data is crucial for a host of business requirements – dynamic job scheduling, meeting service level agreements, ensuring that duty-of-care responsibilities are met and delivering good customer service.

Lately the accent has been on providing data that will demonstrate compliance with service level agreements, and show that key performance indicators are being achieved. The objective is simple but compelling: it's about driving cost out of the business without having an adverse effect impact on service levels. A neat circle to square if you can.

And a logical one. The current troubled economic climate has prompted businesses to look for efficiencies at the very time when their customers are looking for improved service levels. That's how Steve Reynolds, managing director of mobile computing software specialist TBS, sums up the situation.

"An unpredictable business climate means constant scrutiny of workforce capacity," he says. "Mobile solutions have been proven to help drive fieldworker efficiency, and the addition of dynamic scheduling gives a new dimension."

Andrew Yeoman of Trimble Fleet Solutions agrees, and sums up the attractions succinctly. "Advances in telematics technology are maximising productivity and profitability," he says. "It's a win-win

Utilities and public-sector organisations are reliant on mobile workers, and in the current climate it's even more important to know where they are and what they're doing. It's where service improvements and savings begin



•It's a win-win solution, bringing increased efficiency at a lower cost*

Andrew Yeoman, Trimble Fleet Solutions

solution, bringing increased efficiency at a lower cost, as well as service delivery excellence that drives customer retention."

DYNAMIC SCHEDULING

Service companies need real-time data to be able to react to events – emergency jobs coming in, scheduled jobs taking longer than planned. Dynamic scheduling has been around for some time, but the latest software is attempting to automate more of the decision-making. At the same time, customer expectations are rising.

Even those service companies who think they are doing well can't afford to be complacent, says Trimble's Yeoman. In a survey commissioned by Trimble from OnePoll, seven out of ten people said that they would be put off ordering from those firms that only offer day-long timeslots in which to make deliveries or provide services.

"Some services providers such as utilities companies could be losing out because they are failing to offer appointment timeslots that fit in with modern consumers' needs. The survey clearly shows that if businesses were able to →



be more flexible with their delivery or appointment timeslots, they could potentially retain and win more business."

Steve Reynolds puts some figures on the benefits. "Fieldworkers can be made 15 to 35 per cent more efficient with a scheduling solution, automating decisions that have traditionally been made manually, slowly and less efficiently," he argues. "The real-time information provided from a tracking solution can inform scheduling technology, making instant decisions accounting for multiple variables, such as a fieldworker's availability, resources and location."

"Many utilities companies are already taking advantage of intelligent telematics solutions to offer specific or shorter time windows for their appointments," Andrew Yeoman reports. "Telematics solutions use the information to provide accurate travel times to the vehicle's next destination, and are a prerequisite for identifying delays.



Employers simply cannot afford to adopt an 'out of sight, out of mind' attitude when it comes to their mobile workforce" Giles Margerison, TomTom

first-time fix, including tasks that might require two people to attend. Real-time stock management is a growing trend, says Chevallier. "First-time fix rates can rely on having the right part available, whether on the vehicle, at the customer's premises, or easily obtained from a local depot."

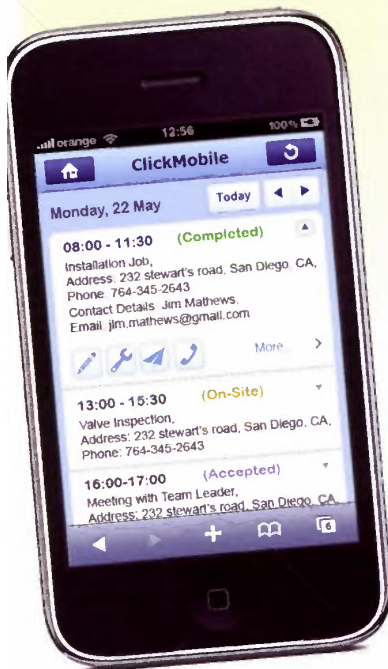
PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The sheer depth and range of data available has proved vital in delivering greater efficiencies, says Giles Margerison, director UK & Ireland for TomTom Business Solutions. TomTom's Webfleet dashboard provides a visual representation of KPIs affecting service levels, productivity, cost and safety. It allows the employer to set benchmarks for each, and monitor individual performance.

Cognito's Chevallier agrees that service management for utilities companies is about managing huge volumes of information and understanding what's actually

Engineers can use their mobile devices to be proactive about booking second or further appointments"

Stewart Hill, ClickSoftware



"On the basis of these times, alternative vehicles can be diverted from their current routes towards new destinations to meet prearranged appointment times. With such accurate information, companies can go a step further and actually contact customers prior to an appointment to give a precise arrival time."

Automation of decision-making is the key to driving efficiencies because it promotes standardisation, which in turns drives further improvement. That's the intriguing analysis from Jonathan Chevallier, strategy director at Cognito. "Once the tracking feed data is in the system," he says, "you can adjust schedules dynamically.

However, he also gives a warning. "Beware of introducing too much change at once. Chaos can result and you won't be able to identify what is causing the problem."

Stewart Hill, ClickSoftware's director of corporate marketing, says the latest scheduling algorithms are making further service improvements, too. "For instance, engineers on visits, whether to homes, offices or sites, can use their mobile devices to be proactive about booking second or further appointments.

"The dynamic scheduling resolves potential conflicts because, for example, the algorithms are sophisticated enough to take care of SLAs by offering the customer either an appointment that meets the SLA or an alternative time outside the SLA. If the SLA is breached, it's been done for the customer's convenience, and that flexibility is appreciated."

Field service software already provides for profiling of jobs and skills required for a



Fieldworkers can be made 15 to 35 per cent more efficient with a scheduling solution" Steve Reynolds, TBS

going on in the field. "A well-tuned and well set-up service management system should run well at least 90 per cent of the time. Managers need the data to be presented in snapshot, which puts them in a position to make any crucial real-time intervention."

Chevallier says it is equally important to investigate trends in SLA failure alerts. "If alerts of potential SLA failures are generated regularly, it can be a problem for senior managers to pinpoint what is triggering the various alerts – it's like snow blindness. The data needs to be analysed to provide an overall picture."

He says managers don't need to examine every alert, but do need to see if a



THE SERVICE COMPANY VIEW

In the current economic climate customers are asking their contractors for cost reductions. "The challenge for us is in trying to accommodate these demands without reducing service levels or compromising on planned maintenance schedule," says Maxwell Segal, technology and innovations director for facilities management specialist GSH.

"We are having to find innovative ways to reduce costs, and it's technology that is helping to driving efficiencies. Reducing mileages and improving scheduling, matching skill levels to the job – these are some of the benefits that technology can deliver."

An alternative is not to reduce the price but to add

value, says Segal. "Businesses need to be innovative to improve historically low margins, and technology can help them do that. How they meet SLAs, how they visit the site, gaining prior-access approval and better communications – all these things can make service employees more productive."

Technology is also helping to drive a trend for engineers on site for one job to identify other work that needs doing, he reports. "They can raise the job order on site. The customer benefits because they don't have to factor in another visit from another engineer, while the contractor benefits by saving on travel cost and gaining in engineer efficiency." ■

particular pattern is emerging. "For example, are SLAs genuinely declining? Is the issue local to one area with specific transport problems? Is it down to slack management or individuals?"

TomTom's Margerison points out that simply requiring employees to log on when they start work can bring a host of KPI benefits because all work-related mileage is recorded. "As a result, businesses can prove the whereabouts of their workforce at all times, highlighting exactly when they reached or left a specific site. It allows customers to be provided with transparent invoices, which can prove particularly valuable in the case of disputes."

All the data can be integrated with payroll and billing systems, he says, resulting in smarter, faster calculations and payments, reducing administration.

The latest systems can go a stage further in data analysis, not only helping operators to meet KPIs in terms of contract, but also providing employee performance management.

"This is crucial when trying to drive efficiencies," says Chevallier. "You can track which employees are signing on late, which are working harder to achieve SLAs, which are complying with job processes and which are achieving good customer satisfaction feedback." The data can be used in positive

ways to reward best-performing workers as well as identifying those that need further training, he says.

DUTY OF CARE

"Employers simply cannot afford to adopt an 'out of sight, out of mind' attitude when it comes to their mobile workforce, and efficient fleet management will help them avoid prosecution," says Giles Margerison of TomTom. "Businesses are required to display a strong duty of care towards employees – reinforced by the Corporate Manslaughter Act – and failure to comply could leave directors facing huge fines or even jail."

Tracking technology can provide cost-effective legal support through the production of a detailed and comprehensive audit trail, Margerison points out. "Fleet managers can keep an eye out to ensure that working time limits include the hours employees spend behind the wheel of their vehicle getting to and from a job."

He adds: "Too few employers can demonstrate to the standard required in a court of law that their employees are expected to obey the speed limits and exhibit appropriate safe driving behaviour."

Chevallier says that while technology can deliver data on speeding and driving behaviour, Cognito clients are polarised over whether they need to be this proactive. "If