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August 2014

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# Take Fleet Management Beyond Track And Trace

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Rob Koch, VP of operations (left), and Todd Perzee, director of business development, A.N. Webber


photos by David Joel

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# Take Fleet Management Beyond Track And Trace

by Brian Albright

When GPS-based fleet tracking solutions first emerged, most operators were happy to be able to use the technology to answer a basic question: "Where's my truck?" Over time, new fleet solutions have emerged that can provide greater insight into and control over routing, improved dispatching, vehicle maintenance, safety, and regulatory compliance.

For early adopters, moving beyond the location-only model of fleet management can be an important competitive differentiator. And if you're a first-time user of fleet management, it's important to understand the capabilities of today's fleet management solutions go far beyond just track-and-trace functionality. You want to consider all of the value a fleet management solution can bring your organization, not just the location visibility.

A.N. Webber is a great example of one of the companies that started with a more basic fleet management solution and has moved to the next generation to take advantage of some of the additional benefits fleet management can provide.

Spurred by the rising cost of fuel, A.N. Webber recently deployed a new hosted telematics and fleet management solution that provided both location and operational data on its trucks. Having access to more detail about how its trucks are being used (as opposed to just where they are) has allowed the company to reduce idling and fuel consumption and provide better delivery information for its customers. It has also automated the monitoring of driver hours-of-service (HOS) logs, which has reduced paperwork, data entry, and HOS violations for the company.

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A.N. Webber is a transportation, logistics, and warehousing company based in

Kankakee, IL. It has offices in Tennessee, Texas, and South Carolina and provides services across the lower 48 states, in addition to Canada and Mexico. Its fleet of 180 vehicles includes dry vans, drop-frame vans, containers, flatbeds, and tankers.

## Seeking A More Advanced Fleet Management Solution

A.N. Webber had a satellite tracking solution in place for roughly 10 years, but according to Rob Koch, vice president of operations, the technology was not growing with the company's needs. "We wanted more operational data, which meant a product that could tie in to the tractor's electronic control module (ECM)," Koch says. "When fuel costs started spiking, it was very important for us to be able to track idle time and miles per gallon, but the company we were with just wasn't growing and developing the technology to provide that tracking."

Further, new Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (CSA) hours of service requirements meant that the company would be under even more pressure to maintain accurate driver logs. A.N. Webber wanted a solution that could enable automated, electronic driver logs to help reduce paperwork and, most importantly, ensure compliance.

Faced with rising fuel costs and outmoded tracking technology, the company began looking for a new fleet management solution in 2010. Koch spearheaded the effort and evaluated several providers. The company ultimately selected the Teletrac Fleet Director platform based on its feature set and price. "We first evaluated solutions based on their ability to help us accomplish the goals we'd set forth. Once we narrowed down the vendors based on their ability to deliver the services we needed, then we selected based on price," Koch says.

## Thorough Pilot Validates Solution Performance

Koch ran a 20-unit pilot test of the Teletrac Web-based fleet management solution for roughly six months to make sure it would perform as advertised. He also wanted to make sure that the in-cab hardware was driver-friendly, and that there was ample coverage in the U.S. and Canada to provide real-time, accurate fleet data. The company deployed pilot units in multiple geographies, since A.N. Webber operates both regional and over-the-road services in different states.

With the pilot complete and having confirmed its performance, Koch prepared to move forward with the full deployment. "We didn't really have any issues during the pilot. The system performed as expected and gave us good, accurate data," Koch says. "It fit well into our operations and provided the features

### The Value Of Real-Time Driver Communication

Trucking company A.N. Webber wanted a new fleet management solution that would enable quick and effective communication with drivers.

Previously, drivers had to call dispatchers on the phone, which led to time-consuming waits on hold and multiple returned calls in order to provide details on new loads and routes. After evaluating several solutions, A.N. Webber selected Teletrac Fleet Director, a platform that not only provides GPS location and vehicle operational data, but also includes in-cab computers that allow dispatchers and drivers to exchange two-way messages. That two-way messaging functionality has been a critical part of the solution's success at A.N. Webber, improving driver communications and dispatch operations.

Using the in-vehicle tablets, drivers can quickly create time- and date-stamped messages for dispatchers that can be identified by vehicle. Fleet Director can send outbound messages to any subfleet group or individual vehicles. "Under the old system, the driver would call us, and they'd have to wait for a dispatcher to answer. Now they can send a message and dispatch responds quickly. A lot of detailed load instructions could be lost in a phone call. With the messaging, the drivers can go back and review special instructions. They don't have to remember everything or write it down," Rob Koch, vice president of operations at A.N. Webber, says.

Teletrac Fleet Director includes in-cab tablets that enable real-time communication with the drivers, which has reduced A.N. Webber's dispatch call volume by 50%.

Messages can be sent as canned messages, free-text messages, or fill-in-the-blank forms. Forty inbound and outbound preset/canned messages are available in the solution for commonly occurring situations. Form-filled messages are template-based and can be created and reused. Free-text messages can be used to send 500-character notes providing more detailed load information or special instructions. The messages are chronologically logged in the data view so supervisors or dispatchers can quickly review them.

The solution also allows dispatchers to send updated route information to the drivers for last-minute changes, and the integrated navigation app automatically updates the map to show the new route. Drivers can also ask questions about weather, road conditions, and company memos. For more information, visit www.teletrac.com.

that would allow us to monitor and track what we wanted."

## Web-Based Fleet Management Enables 30-Day Deployment

Largely thanks to the Web-based nature of the Teletrac solution, A.N. Webber was able to deploy the new system across its entire fleet in just 30 days. As vehicles came in for regular maintenance at the corporate office and in the operating terminal in El Paso, A.N. Webber maintenance staff installed the in-cab Fleet Director Tablet driver interface, antennas, and tracking hardware.

While the hardware installation went quickly, Koch says the company didn't enable the system's full functionality right away. Rather, A.N. Webber decided to start slowly with basic functionality and build on from there. "Teletrac had a reasonably priced product and gave us everything we were looking for, along with more features we have since grown into," Koch says. "We wanted to start simple, to just locate drivers and track performance of the equipment. Since then we've built on those basic features and developed into electronic logging, onboard communication, and other functions." Phasing a deployment in this way, especially with a solution that offers as much as today's fleet management solutions typically do, is a good way to master one component before you move to another, versus taking on too much at once and becoming overwhelmed.

## Next-Generation Fleet Management Provides Far Broader Functionality

The GPS hardware sends vehicle location data to Teletrac's servers, along with data pulled from each truck's ECM, including information about idling, speeding, fuel consumption, and other data. All of this information can be accessed via a Web portal and compiled into a variety of reports. The solution also integrates directly with the company's current transportation management system.

A.N. Webber does all of its dispatching via Teletrac, although currently dispatchers manually send load information via a text message to the in-cab computers in the trucks. Drivers receive all instructions and orders, next dispatch information, leave-out times, and delivery information on the cab-mounted tablet devices.

Dispatchers are able to keep tabs on the entire fleet and monitor delivery schedules. "Operationally, our dispatchers use the new solution for instant location information," Koch says. "We know how the drivers are progressing, and if they're on-time with their schedules."

## Incentive Program Leads To Reduction In Idling, Fuel Savings

As part of the company's efforts to reduce fuel consumption, A.N. Webber has leveraged the data from the new solution to develop an incentive program for drivers based on their performance against idle time thresholds. The company can track each truck's fuel usage and idle time in order to better manage costs.

"We set thresholds we want them to stick to," Koch says. "With the idle bonus program we've developed, we put each driver's data in a monthly letter to them so they can see where they are at with fuel use and idle times and what is expected of them. We also break that down to show them the associated costs, and if they meet the goal, they get a bonus."

With the new fleet management solution in place, fleet managers can see the last location of any vehicle, available driver hours, and current location. Dispatchers can now find the vehicle closest to a specific location for pick-ups and deliveries and access the route history of each truck.

The fuel consumption data has also helped reduce costs. The company has reduced idling between 15 to 20 percent since rollout and has increased fuel economy by a mile to a mile and a half per gallon across the fleet.

Once A.N. Webber mastered leveraging the location and vehicle performance data, Koch says the company began rolling out new features of the Teletrac system. Two years into the deployment, Webber rolled out the electronic driver log functionality to automate its HOS reporting.

## Automate HOS Logs To Improve Productivity, Reduce Risk

"Before, the drivers had to maintain paper logs daily with all of the data that's required," Koch says. "We also had compliance staff that had to audit those logs, and we had to keep track of all fuel stops and pretrip inspections. That entire process involved a lot of manual labor."

Because the old processes were paper-based, it was difficult for drivers to keep the logs updated and accurate. Those mistakes could lead to costly violations.

Now, the Teletrac solution automatically monitors hours-of-service data and provides notifications if drivers haven't taken their required breaks or are in danger of exceeding the maximum hours. "The solution automatically updates the driver logs," Koch says. "Our CSA scores have improved. We had issues with the paper logs, and 90 percent of our violations were because the logbooks were not current. The solution has eliminated all of our violations because the HOS logs are instantly and automatically updated."

**"The solution has eliminated all of our violations because the HOS logs are instantly and automatically updated."**

Rob Koch, A.N. Webber

### In-Cab Tablets Provide Automated Navigation

At the same time the driver log feature was implemented, A.N. Webber also added an automatic navigation component to the system. When drivers receive addresses from the dispatchers, they can access commercial trucking routes and directions on the in-vehicle tablet. By providing load and route information on the tablets, the company has also eliminated time-consuming phone calls between the drivers and dispatchers. In fact, Koch says that phone volume in the dispatch area has been cut in half, and communication between drivers and dispatchers has improved thanks to the text messaging function.

Another benefit of the new solution is that A.N. Webber is also now able to provide more information to its customers about their loads, because all of the location data is readily available online. "We can give customers better tracking information and updated load information instantly," Koch says. "A lot of our customers also require regular hourly updates, so we can provide that information much more easily. I can even give customers access to the information directly because the system is Web-based."

Internal staff also have better access to information, as well as those who are out-of-office. Because of the Web-based nature of the application, Koch can access the vehicle data remotely from his phone when he's away from the office, so if a problem arises while he's on the road, he can immediately find any truck or load via the Teletrac dashboard.

### Next Steps For Fleet Management

A.N. Webber isn't stopping there. The company has additional planned changes that will bring further benefits. For example, this summer, Webber is scheduled to go live with a new dispatch solution from McLeod Software that will provide full integration with Teletrac. "That system will include live updates, so the driver can just tell us he is empty, and the system will automatically send him the information on the next load as long as it's predispatched," Koch says. "Once Teletrac is integrated with McLeod, all necessary dispatch information will be automatically pulled from the McLeod software."

With that integration, A.N. Webber will have leveraged its fleet management technology as part of an end-to-end solution that utilizes GPS data to enable automated dispatch, driver logs, fuel management, and real-time delivery status updates for its customers. The company has moved from the "Where's my truck?" model of fleet management to a solution that generates a wide variety of actionable business data to improve the entire logistics process.

Hopefully A.N. Webber's story inspires you to think beyond track and trace to see what else fleet management can do for your company. ●