

DROWNING IN DATA?

Help is at hand as advances in technology help fleet decision-makers manage an ever-increasing data pool across every element of business operations. *Andrew Don* reports

Fleet decision-makers have never had access to more data than they have now.

From information about drivers, driver behaviour, vehicles and maintenance, to business mileage reimbursement, insurance and risk profiles, organisations can have greater insight into their operations than ever before.

But this has both benefits and drawbacks.

"Whether you are looking at making changes, improvements or finding innovations, it all boils down to data," says Denise Hawkins, fleet and insurance manager at ABM. "We have data coming in from everywhere: from telematics, fuel usage, service history, mileage reports, tyre history and accident reports.

"You can create individual reports on accident history, for example, to send to board members, or speeding reports used for reprimanding or following up on training needs. You may be looking at your mileage reporting to adjust your contracts.

"There is just so much coming through and data

really can become your friend to trigger improvements and innovation when combined and analysed all together."

However, having access to this huge amount of information has a downside: it is easy to feel swamped by facts and figures.

"You're not going to be alone with sometimes feeling like you're drowning in the amounts of

information you have," says Hawkins.

The data available to fleets is set to increase further in the coming years, says Peter Golding, managing director of FleetCheck, with most fleet decision-makers already admitting they have not kept on top of everything their current information can already achieve.

Potential areas from where more data will be



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coming include using tools for remote training and apps for vehicle checks and allowing drivers to 'clock on'.

"As we head into 2021 we are seeing that the continuing economic uncertainty caused by the coronavirus crisis has prompted many fleets to look again at their fundamentals. How they measure key aims using data has become an increasingly important topic," says Golding.

"However, we're now at a moment when the pandemic means that a huge number of businesses are re-examining their fleet activities from the ground up – and data is an area where it is generally agreed that real gains can be made. The aim of these fleets is to use the information available to measure key objectives but also to investigate areas where they are able to gain new levels of oversight over their operations.

"They are very much open to new ideas and new thinking."


Hawkins uses the software included in Microsoft Office Enterprise to collate ABM's data, which is analysed in-house, but many organisations use dedicated fleet management software packages from companies such as Jaama and Chevin (see profile, pages 38-39).

These enable the data to be presented in easily digestible formats and allow the users to set parameters to manage by exception.

REMOTE ACCESS

The ability to access crucial business information from any location has also become more important this year as the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly increased remote working.

Martin Evans, managing director of Jaama, says this is where web-based systems are essential to provide accessibility to remote users.

"The old adage of 'necessity drives innovation' comes to mind as many people working from home cannot rely on office-based filing cabinets," Evans adds. 



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DENISE HAWKINS, ABM

SPONSOR'S COMMENT

**By Martin Evans, Jaama MD
and director of the AFP**



Jaama's Key2 fleet management software is still at the heart of keeping fleets on the road and compliant during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis.

This includes logistics and bluelight fleets, which working around the clock to keep the country safe and moving along.

Companies have faced many driver and vehicle challenges during 2020 and into 2021. We have seen the pandemic speed up the gestation period of adopting new fleet management systems and our stringent internal processes have enabled us to implement systems and train users remotely to help customers meet their business objectives.

Being paper-free has been an objective for Jaama and many of its customers, to reduce the risk of spreading the virus between driver paperwork and office-based staff and to enable remote working and streamline processes.

This objective has accelerated the adoption of Jaama's smartphone app – MyVehicle App – that fully integrates with Key2 and enables drivers to carry out vehicle inspections and log defects via their smartphones.

The grey fleet usage of the app has also seen a third more traffic as many drivers switch from public transport to their own vehicles for business travel.

All Jaama customers continue to benefit from a raft of new features and improvements in functionality every six months as part of its continued multi-million annual system investment. Once you are a Jaama customer you are always using the latest version with no need to budget for costly upgrades.

For further information: website – www.jaama.co.uk; email – enquiries@jaama.co.uk; telephone – 0844 8484 333.

The continuous evolution of cloud storage, apps, driver personal digital assistants (PDAs) and artificial intelligence (AI) has continued to ensure fleets can easily access the information they need to help them run an efficient and effective operation.

Use of the cloud, says Will Wycks, senior vice-president, product and marketing, at Chevin Fleet Solutions, helps to scale data, negating the need to replace a server. "You can easily upscale in line with data demand," he adds.

Wycks says AI enables fleet professionals to automate decisions and predict trends. It can be used to identify breakdown patterns for specific vehicles with specific mileage on the clock, for example, which can save businesses a significant amount of time and money.

Matt Goodstadt, divisional director at Civica, adds: "We can also use AI embedded into our mobile app so if a driver takes a photo of a tyre or chipped windscreen, it can advise if it needs replacing because the edge of the tyre has feathering or the chip is too large to fix."

Another trend has also stood out over the past two to three years, says Keith Watson, country manager UK and Ireland at Astrata Europe: integration of fleet data with other business functions. "Historically, fleet was a separate business func-



IT'S A TOOL THAT HAS REALLY HELPED THE BUSINESS

SHAUN ATTON, AUTO WINDSCREENS

tion operating out of back office systems," he says. "This is changing. Businesses now see the value in integrating fleet operations into the wider business: streamlining of job allocation with workflow integration and working hours data for payroll and ePOD [electronic proof of delivery] for immediate invoicing are among the areas where businesses can benefit from fleet and back office integration."

This has been the case at Auto Windscreens, where the IT department has adapted its own Field

Service Manager core operating system so it can be used for fleet management as well as across the rest of the business.

"I was offered many different fleet management platforms from different providers and, although they all look great and like they could do a job for me, I wanted a one-stop solution to tie in with everything the Auto Windscreens brand already used," says Shaun Atton, group fleet manager at Auto Windscreens.

"We've managed to build in data on MOTs, service records and intervals, and lease profiles and costs into one system. On the back of that, we've got a bespoke reporting suite that allows me to share information with my team, the directors and operational teams, and it's a tool that's really helped the business that we've not had in the past. A lot of the teams were spending time hunting for things on different spreadsheets and systems. We've pulled that together now, which has saved labour and time, and gives us visibility of all our fleet."

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BOOM IN INNOVATION TO FACE PANDEMIC CHALLENGES HEAD-ON

Fleets have had to innovate this year to meet challenges posed by the pandemic, and a number of fleet software management companies have developed new products to help them.

Fleetcheck launched its Back to Work app for car and van operators in June and its managing director Peter Golding says this bridges an area of risk management for which there was no obvious solution: what to do about vehicles and drivers that have been outside of normal fleet operations for an extended time.

It covers issues such as driver health and fitness and special attention is paid to coronavirus symptoms and the condition of the vehicle.

Civica says that it has seen a huge rise in

innovation internally and from its customers during the pandemic.

"Some of this is around necessity because of social distancing and remote working and, for some customers in specific sectors that serve the hospitality sector, a significant downturn in revenues," says Matt Goodstadt, of Civica.

The company developed and launched a self-service check-in and collection facility for those dropping vehicles at workshops for maintenance.

Goodstadt says a "simple" touchscreen app removes the need for face-to-face contact, and also means administration staff can work from home rather than at the facility.

"It's also been key to reducing paperwork handing – which increases the risk of passing on the virus – by using mobile apps for daily vehicle checks, or technicians using their own tablet rather than paper records or shared hardware."

Jaama has launched compliance and maintenance management platform Maintenance Exchange. This is designed to allow seamless booking, authorisation, invoicing and auditing of vehicle maintenance work.

Jaama says maintenance can be authorised through the platform and built-in rules mean that job invoices carried out can be paid in a timely manner once all required documentation is present.