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software without boundaries

Telematics comes of age

Telematics is already showing promise in terms of revolutionising **vehicle asset management.** It has enabled the launch of new businesses like car clubs and cheaper insurance for young drivers and is making in-roads into **fleet management.**

The technology started out as a way of **locating and recovering stolen vehicles,** through the use of **embedded in-vehicle hardware** and wireless and satellite communications networks, plus GPS (Global Positioning Systems).

Early applications also included computer controlled fuel injection and anti-lock braking. Newer embedded systems encompass anti-collision control, active noise reduction and electronic clutches.

Different from but often confused with telemetry (best known for its application in motor sport), telematics enables data as to how, when and where the vehicle is being driven and how it is performing to be collected. However, the two technologies are often employed in the same M2M (Machine to Machine) solution but perform disparate functions.

Telematics in Vehicle Accident management

Helphire has been a **Bynx** customer since 2007 when **bynxFLEET** was deployed to provide a single, unified and future-proofed management platform to support business growth and development.

Founded in 1992, Helphire Group plc is the market leader in the provision of accident management services to motorists involved in accidents, which were not their fault. Services provided include: provision of replacement hire vehicles, vehicle repair management, full claims handling assistance, uninsured loss recovery, personal injury management and intervention services.

Helphire employs over 1,200 people at sites across the UK and operates through a national branch network of 25 depots. It manages a fleet of over 7,000 vehicles, ranging from typical domestic models, scooters and motorbikes to prestige marques and commercial vans.

In the year to June 2012 (when this article was written) the company grossed £224.3m, managed over 129,000 hires, nearly 48,000 vehicle repairs and around 28,000 personal injury cases.

Tim Bailey, fleet services director at Helphire Group, takes up the story:

"First of all, we need a good tracking system that gives us an accurate picture of where our vehicles are at any one time. We need the information without having to rely on customers, staff or third parties keeping the system up-to-date. We then need a system that gives us a significant step forward in fleet management, alongside heightening our ability to control the fleet, tighten security and step up efficiency."

Total Accident Management, the Bath-based repair and claims management subsidiary of Helphire Group recently launched a real-time fleet management tool – Total Intelligence in partnership with Trak Global Solutions, the telematics supplier to the insurance and car rental industries – and also a **Bynx** telematics technology partner.

Mark Gainford, who was at the time TrakGlobal's sales and marketing director pointed out:

"To realise the full value of telematics you need to consider an integrated approach with other technology providers and back-office systems. Working together with **Bynx,** Helphire has been able to prevent information silos from developing, alongside improving the richness of information and depth of the solution."

Total Intelligence can be tailored according to the requirements of fleet operators - including monitoring driver behaviour, proactive management of accidents and identifying fraudulent activity.

The system has been designed to provide detailed information including:

- Identifying incidents in "real time" – by alerting the fleet manager immediately when an incident has occurred and the severity of damage.
- Notification of repair completion, keeping vehicle downtime and associated costs to a minimum.
- Identifying when a vehicle has been stolen and initiating a quick and successful recovery.
- Collating data that can determine liability and protect fleets from fraudulent activity.
- Keep company car drivers safe and help businesses comply with the law and duty of care requirements.
- Reducing fuel fraud by checking fuel fills against business/private mileage expense claims.
- Reduce a business' carbon footprint and saving money by monitoring mileage and driver performance of company car drivers.

The system also incorporates a number of features which enables fleet tracking and accurate measurement including driver behaviour scoring whilst technology includes Thatcham CAT 6 approved unit, Google mapping and odometer capture.

Bailey adds:

"Our funders are much happier because they can see that we are operating more efficiently, that we are reducing costs and wastage, dismissing fraud and retaining asset value. We use the data the system provides to measure our performance on a weekly basis so we can see improvements. Specifically, we have greatly reduced our insurance costs and our fleet size by 200 vehicles, while still maintaining the same level of business. We are quite simply a better business all round."

Alongside partnering with TrakGlobal, **Bynx** has other telematics technology partners such as Concirrus and TBS, which enables the company to provide a complete **end-to-end telematics vehicle management system.** Concirrus designs, builds and operates **remote telemetry solutions** that connect front and back office fleet management, measures information and makes it available to key decision makers.

Without Concirrus, designing and building such a solution would be a prohibitively complex, detailed and lengthy process and take far too long for today's response-driven businesses.

Tyre Pressure Monitoring Solutions (TPMS)

Concirrus also offers market leading solutions for tyre pressure monitoring that further enables fleet managers to decrease fuel costs and tyre wear while increasing safety.

Sensors are quickly and easily fitted onto the vehicle's tyre valve system. This can be done with no specialist tools or skills required. The wheel assembly stays in tact and it takes fewer than 15 minutes for a four-wheel vehicle.

Telematics in Information and Workflow Management

TBS Enterprise Mobility employs telematics to offer a host of solutions for information and workflow management – including remote inspection devices used in **vehicle damage assessment.** Their system marries the power and functionality of mobile devices (Smartphones, Personal Digital Assistants, Tablets and ruggedized handhelds) with telematics solutions and **enterprise vehicle management systems** such as **bynxFLEET.**

TaskMaster, for example, offers payback for fleets in terms of its ability to manage the workflow of the delivery, collection and inspection process for hire and de-fleet. The condition of a vehicle can be accurately assessed and logged at hand-over. This enables fair and accurate billing for damages while taking into account fair-wear-and-tear standards. Payback also comes from enhanced customer service as TaskMaster allows delivery drivers to be monitored (as to location) via GPS tracking contained in either their handheld (such as a smartphone) or in-vehicle device.

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TaskMaster can be used for:

- Advanced damage input via vehicle diagrams.
- Vehicle damage assessment.
- Vehicle identification.
- Automatic image capture.
- Damage report printing.
- Damage cost calculation.
- Signature capture.

The challenge for operators is to unlock the value of telematics applications for users by coming up with desirable products like: automatic emergency call, assistance, concierge services, access control, dynamic navigation, traffic information, location-based services, news, weather, stock information, mobile internet, mobile office, on-demand content, audio, video and games. All things that end users want and that benefit them.

Many of these, such as those classified as infotainment, mobile office and email, can only be used in car parks or by passengers in a vehicle and not by the driver while driving. Safety concerns need to be addressed but the beauty of telematics is that certain applications and features can be rules-based and system locked and unlocked so that only particular ones can be accessed and used while the vehicle is being driven or parked, as appropriate.

It's easy to get excited about telematics technology; there are so many possibilities within the vehicle management space. The next-generation will appear above the dashboard. Many in the industry are pinning their hopes on it to keep markets buoyant.

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