

THE MUDDY WATERS OF TRUCK REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE

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Yes, this is going to ruffle some feathers. But in order to prove the point, I will site an example from my own experience as a Fleet Management professional.



A fully laden truck, up to legal axle loading, leaves Cape Town, and develops a slight problem in that the driver feels the truck is slightly under powered. He stops in at Beaufort West, and the agents replace all six injectors at a cost of R56 000.00.

The driver continues, and when reaching Bloemfontein, still feels the truck is under-performing. Once again, a day is wasted diagnosing the problem, and the injectors are once again removed, tested, cleaned, calibrated and refitted, at a further cost of R16 000.00.

The truck continues to Johannesburg, where it is once again subjected to investigation, and a mapping problem is discovered, rectified at a further cost, and the truck is released.

The Fleet Manager refuses to pay for the first two repairs, asking why the problem could not have been identified at the first visit to the agents workshops

in Beaufort West. A dispute is declared, relations are strained, and the matter is never really resolved. Credits are passed, apologies are made etc etc. It's all so old.

However, subsequent investigations show that there has been numerous occasions in the past where work has been wrongly priced, and always to the benefit of the service provider.

Further investigation (these are real cases) brought to light that the problem is endemic in the industry, and that service providers have been doing this for many years, and has been getting away with it. Other service providers looked up in shock and dismay when confronted with clear evidence of invoicing where, for example, the same item or work is priced differently, with different descriptions, on different pages of the invoice. This illustrates a clear intention to defraud the transport operator, and they have been doing this with malicious and greedy intent for as long as the relationship existed.

So what do we do? How do we counter this process and ensure that transport operators pay for only the work that was really required in the first place, and how do we create an environment where there is a good, clear and healthy business understanding between service provider and operator? The problem here runs deeper than the inaccurate and fraudulent invoicing practices. There is a clear knock-on effect in that operators are forced to pay these exorbitant amounts of money for work that needs to be done, and they have to generate savings from somewhere else in order to remain profitable. With extremely tight margins pushed down onto them by freight brokerages, they have few places to turn to resolve the issue.

The answer to this lies in systems and procedures. Each repair and service must be the subject of a well designed system, within which certain processes must take place, and part of these processes will be the checks and balances that monitors the process from start to end. This is not a difficult, or expensive concept to adopt, but it is very necessary if operators want to maximize on their available maintenance budgets.

With ITIS, our systems monitors every step of the way, and reports to the fleet manager where it stands. Invoices are clearly measured against job cards, every deviance is noted and queried, and service providers are requested to explain each entry, and is forced to justify every expenditure listed which is not contained on the original job card. Simple, effective, cheap, and saving you money.