

FLEET MANAGEMENT AND TRACKING WHAT IS OUT THERE?

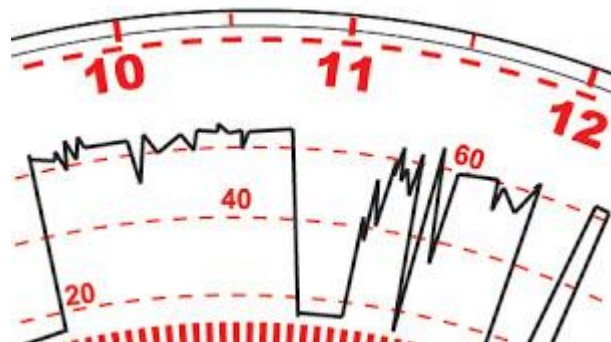
October-2015

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Vehicle tracking in the modern day has evolved from the basic Tachograph made by Kienzle, to the much more sophisticated tracking, monitoring and location-based systems that are available to us today. I am not a specialist in the field, and my experience with tracking systems has always been in the client side, where people tried to sell their products to me, listing features which I did not understand, to ones I did not need. I am writing this to provide some of the answers that Fleet Managers and Transport Owners may have, and to gather data in an effort to understand the technologies better, and to be able to differentiate between the various modes of operation.

There are two main parts to vehicle monitoring which requires understanding. The first is data that indicates the location of the vehicle geographically. In most cases, this is also the primary requirement which operators require from a system. They want to know where their assets are, when they deviate from routes, and where they can be recovered from when they have been stolen or hijacked.



Secondly, owners and fleet managers want to know how the vehicle is being utilized and how it is performing at any particular time. Fuel consumption can be monitored, harsh braking, extended idling times are among the more important parameters that can be monitored. Advanced features such as door opening, Power take Off engagements, operation of lights and other vehicle components can also be done.

There are many systems available on the market, and we regularly see new entrants into what is already a highly competitive environment. Each new system is being advertised as having



advanced features, but in reality they all do the same thing. The method is which they do this differs, but even here there is little to distinguish the outputs from each other. Some systems use genuine GPS Global positioning. Others use mobile phone triangulation. Some use a combination of the two. It really depends on what the client wants, and the level of accuracy that is required.

Many users of these systems use route planning as one of the features, setting it up in such a manner that any deviance from preset routes will raise an alarm and generate a response from someone. Often this will be in the form of a 24 hour manned control room, where the staff obtains great pleasure from calling fleet managers in the middle of the night to inform them that something is wrong.

Other users may require a facility that will allow them to manually deactivate a vehicle remotely, once it has been confirmed that something is indeed going wrong. However, very few actually ever use this facility since it comes with it's own inherent dangers.

Perhaps the most important aspect in vehicle monitoring and electronic fleet management is the management systems that supports the operation of an advanced system that has cost the owner a fair amount of money to install. Unfortunately, this is where many, if not the most of the operators fall down. The belief that an advanced



system will now solve all of their fuel and vehicle abuse problems is based on how well the salesman did his job. The systems available today are all very good, with a few exceptions. They all operate in essentially the same manner, and they all spew out tons of data on an hourly basis. If there are no management systems and processes in place that can utilize these outputs, then the data is essentially useless. Often no specific instruction or guidance is given to any individuals to actively interrogate the system and to use the data towards any real and valuable, cost effective outcome. Terra bytes of data is being accumulated every day, with very little benefit to the owners, simply because they do not know what to do with it and how to use it effectively.

The truth is that when systems are designed to support this data and put it to use, then the real benefits of fleet and vehicle management come to the fore. Neglecting this important step is nothing other than paying good money

for which you get no real return. It is critical that operators become aware of the capacity these fancy systems has to make their lives easier, and to save them money. It is ironic that many of us will install these systems, then believe that they will take care of themselves, or we will expect the service provider to always be available to analyse data and provide reports.

The final question to be answered is an extremely dangerous one. How do you know you can trust the data that your system provides you? How do you know that the data displays a true reflection of the actual events it is reporting on? Was there ever an opportunity between the event, and the data arriving on your desk, where the data could have been manipulated or changed in any way? Did you write the security of the data into your specification? If not, then you should do so. People will do anything to safeguard themselves or to hide reality from authorities.



At ITIS we have the skills to support you in all of the above, to ensure that system specifications will provide you with the product that you need, and will produce data that advances and benefits your fleet.