

Navigating From The Driver's Seat

By Jim Beach,
Technology Editor

In recent issues we've shown how mapping and routing systems help fleets make more productive use of their assets. Such technologies also make the driver's life easier – and less stressful.

While these technologies enforce certain driver behaviors, they also save drivers time with turn-by-turn instructions and navigation.

"Dispatchers want to have more coordination between what they are telling drivers and what drivers are actually doing," says Bernie Hockswender, director of sales for Rand McNally Commercial Transportation.

Noting some drivers may use mapping software on their laptops, Hockswender says that "drivers are realizing that it's actually easier for them to rely on instructions from dispatch if they have technology in place to get driving directions in the cab, either by cellular phone, the Qualcomm or other mobile communications device. The off-the-shelf packages don't have trucking attributes like low bridges, hazmat and other restrictions."

Barend de Wit, who's leased to Merchants Motor Freight in Minneapolis, uses ALK's Co-Pilot Truck on his laptop for navigation purposes. He says he's become so dependent upon the program that, "if they ripped it out of my truck, it would be like taking my left arm."

Based out of Mission, British Columbia, Canada, de Wit says the navigation program makes his life much easier. "You know, a lot of customers want to give you driving directions, but I just tell them to give me their street address and the program will take me right to it. I always know where I am from the GPS capability and I always have an ETA for customers."

As for drivers who might be leery of the tracking and other capabilities of such systems, de Wit says they are missing the point.

"I think once drivers use something like this, they will realize what a helpful tool it is and they realize

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that it makes their job easier. It helps you plan your day better. It's going to be beneficial, so I don't worry about the Big Brother thing."

De Wit says he still carries a map book, but he hasn't looked at it for planning a trip since he started using the ALK system. He uses his map book only when he has to reroute around construction or other problems he might encounter on the route. "I can't see a driver going without some kind of GPS navigation system," he adds. "You have to move with the times."

Driver navigation is a key feature in a number of new and updated products announced recently.

For instance, Qualcomm's new OmniVision mobile computing platform is designed for fleets of all sizes and includes key driver enhancements such as an advanced text-to-speech feature for updating drivers on driving directions, routes or other information. The new system also features an integrated touch screen, color display and a remote control unit allowing drivers quick access to navigation directions and other information. Drivers testing the new system have given the touch-screen and text-to-voice features rave reviews, according to Qualcomm. The new system is backward compatible with the company's existing OmniTracs and OmniExpress systems.

GeoLogic Solutions recently introduced a Windows-based in-cab color display unit for driver logs and on-board navigation functions. The touch-screen display features a high-resolution graphical interface and boasts several new technologies, GeoLogic says.

The new display will be available as an option for new customers and as an upgrade for existing MobileMax customers. Key features include electronic driver logs, text-to-speech capability, mapping and onboard navigation with turn-by-turn directions. The system can be integrated with a fleet's existing software packages. The new MobileMax color

display unit will begin shipping in the fourth quarter of this year. Electronic driver logs will also be available during the fourth quarter, while the onboard navigation and text-to-speech feature will be available in early 2007.

Prophesy Transportation Solutions announced its next-generation mileage product, Prophesy EasyStreet, designed in collaboration with Maptuit Corp. The system offers optimized routing, on-demand directions, truck restrictions and street-level directions. It also provides routing alternatives when roads are closed by weather or other reasons.

The EasyStreet database includes data for 53-foot trailers, height and weight restrictions, more than 16,000 toll roads, and a community of 70,000 drivers who regularly provide feedback and notifications on road conditions, allowing updates to the online database to reflect current conditions in near real-time.

FleetNav Directions from Maptuit is a system integrated into fleet's dispatch that allows drivers to request directions to drop-offs or pick ups from inside the cab. FleetNav Directions calculates not just the shortest route, but the most truck-friendly route, taking into



GeoLogic's new Windows-based in-cab color display unit features touch screen text-to-voice capabilities.

account distance, speed limits, bridge clearances, tolls, driver hours of service rules, fuel prices and other factors.

Maptuit also has introduced a navigation system designed to allow drivers to find the closest service location. The vendor data can be fleet-specific or a set of locations recommended by Maptuit.

Hand-Held Navigation

Drivers can now download maps and driving directions directly to their hand-held devices such as PDAs, cell phones and even iPods.

DeLorme says its new Street Atlas USA 2007 Plus DVD will have this capability, as well as more than 3.5 million new or revised roads in the U.S., plus street-level detail for Canada.

The new Street Atlas's GPS capabilities include GPS voice guidance on laptops, PDAs and cell phones equipped with a GPS receiver. When used for navigation, the system announces street names and exit numbers instead of just "turn right" or "turn left" instructions. The new system also includes a back-on-track routing feature when drivers have to detour around road construction or other problems.

Tele Atlas announced this fall it would be providing digital maps and other navigation content for the soon-to-be released HP iPAQ rx5900 Travel Companion hand-held device. The device will come preinstalled with touch-enabled Tele Atlas digital maps, turn-by-turn navigation and WiFi and Bluetooth capabilities.

Tele Atlas will also provide navigation and mapping content for the recently introduced Nokia N95 multi-media device and the new BlackBerry Maps application in the new BlackBerry Pearl smart phone.

Also new on the hand-held navigation scene is Garmin International's Garmin Mobile 10 product, which turns Bluetooth enabled devices such as laptops, smart phones, Pocket PCs and PDAs into GPS navigation systems. The system includes Garmin navigation software and a GPS system

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