



Managing expectations

Modern workshop management systems can transform not only efficiency, but also the quality and productivity of technicians. John Challen looks at technologies and practices that make a difference

Managing a commercial vehicle workshop is no easy task. While many workshops rely on various technology types to drive a more structured and efficient environment, most also put a lot of effort into technician training and encouraging them to use their initiative.

Bill Davies, owner and founder of Trace Systems, built his business by selling the benefits of barcoding parts, equipment and jobs to workshops. Starting out in fleet management, he now sells the technology – and offers training – to fleet managers, and commercial vehicle garages and workshops around the country. The key, he says, is its simplicity. “We got into barcode-based management systems in the early 1990s and it is very easy to use, which is often all people need to do,” he maintains. “Jobs come out barcoded on a ticket and each item on the card has a barcode, too. We teach the mechanics to go into the parts stores, read the job number [with the scanner] and choose the parts.”

Walkers Snack Foods is one major transport operator that advocates the system, stating that it has benefited from greatly improved efficiency and stock accuracy. “After the mechanics scan the items, they place the barcode reader into a cradle, which automatically loads the details into the system, updating the stock levels and the workshop records,” explains Davies. “Walkers originally started

with one reader, but have since upgraded to two, as they found technicians were waiting to do jobs, while the existing unit was being used by a colleague.”

Improved time management

Trace Systems’ technology can also be used for mechanics’ time recording. “A lot of workshops and garages use time machines, where technicians can clock in and out. But, with our system, you sign onto a job by scanning the sheet when you start a task,” says Davies. “When you start on one job, and then start another, the system automatically stops time on the previous job, because you can’t work on both at the same time,” reasons Davies.

“Productivity in a CV workshop is all about maximising time efficiency. All time not spent on maintaining a vehicle is logged as something else. It may be lunch, meetings, sickness, cleaning the workshop, job preparation. Every part of the job has its place, but managers need to know.”

Davies cites a success story where a technician’s productivity went from 74% to 95% through adopting Trace’s systems. “As a CV garage, that is a massive amount of [extra] profit to make,” he says.

Elsewhere, Glenn Foulger, service manager at Foulger’s (CVS), says that the system has “totally revolutionised how we work”. And he adds: “The systems make everything we do more efficient – from knowing when a vehicle’s next service is due, to what the technicians are doing with their time. It also

Vehicle workshops are running more smoothly, thanks to technology and improved management systems





S&S Distribution says Freeway Fleet Solutions has helped with servicing costs and planning

makes billing much easier, because all we have to do is add a description of the work, as the details of parts and labour are already on the invoice.”

Another operator benefiting from computerised workshop management is transport firm S&S Distribution. By using Freeway Fleet Systems’ technology, S&S has taken more control of vehicle servicing costs, and been able to improve the planning and scheduling of routine servicing, vehicle inspections and MOTs.

The transport company explains that its software manages maintenance on a mixed fleet of 50 trucks that it uses for its Palletline pallet network operation, which serves more than 300 customers.

“Freeway drives maintenance programmes for our dedicated Palletline fleet and, importantly, it also allows us to analyse the running cost for each vehicle and manage the cost of servicing and repairs,” says John Childs, the operator’s IT manager. “We can see precisely how much we paid for parts and which companies supplied them. We can also identify the most cost-competitive suppliers

and this enables us to not only control purchasing, but also manage our suppliers better.”

The software builds accurate maintenance and running cost histories for each vehicle, which, says Childs, also helps guide decisions when buying new trucks. Like the Trace system, it assigns unique numbers to each job and creates a detailed job card. It provides supervisors and managers with an instant view of work in progress, right down to which fitter is working on which vehicle.

“When the fitters have completed their work, the system is updated with what has been done, including parts used,” says Childs. “So, with Freeway, we can analyse vehicle maintenance data very easily in great detail.”

Power to the people

Away from the systems and technology, however, workshop managers are increasingly finding that a range of services, products and equipment can make a substantial difference to the smooth running of workshops and the customer experience.

Examples range from using better cleaning products to investing in battery testing and boosting equipment and pollution control measures. Suppliers such as Rozzone say that adoption can also benefit employees, customers and the environment – while also cutting workshop operating costs and improving efficiency.

To Rozzone, the term ‘sustainable solutions’ also means easier compliance with both current and upcoming legislation, and simpler, more straightforward risk assessments. 

Top 10 tips for fleet and workshop managers

- 1** Invest in an alternative to solvent parts cleaners and choose a product that does the job as well as any mineral solvent, but uses a bioremediation technology to recycle its cleaning fluid. This eliminates the requirement for a monthly service contract and reduces waste disposal costs.
- 2** Remember to check the battery. You have a vehicle in your workshop for a routine service; you check the brakes, oil, tyres and exhaust. So why not the battery? In many workshops, the battery, starter and alternator get overlooked. Neglecting them can lead to premature failure and unnecessary replacement costs.
- 3** Make sure your workshop is equipped with battery chargers that are able to detect charge acceptance, maximise power capabilities and minimise charge time. Eliminate guesswork and ensure two 24v battery systems are balanced for prolonged life and performance.
- 4** A battery booster offers great portability and should be powerful enough to start any vehicle in your fleet.
- 5** Invest in biodegradable and separator-friendly vehicle cleaning solutions. Why use hazardous chemicals when bio-friendly products can deliver the same job?
- 6** Make sure your interceptor tanks meet with UK discharge and oil water consents, with specialist bio tubes that can reduce the oil water discharge by 95%.
- 7** Remove any oil stains from workshop areas, forecourts and car parks, using a biological stain remover that digests oil, diesel and petrol spills and effectively, and is completely biodegradable.
- 8** Use spill pallets on-site, in order to comply with the latest oil storage regulations.
- 9** For quick response to that emergency spill, invest in spill kits and absorbents. These allow for the quick clean-up of oil and non-aggressive chemical spills.
- 10** Ensure your employees are protected when servicing your fleet by using products that limit contact with hazardous substances, while simultaneously saving time, increasing efficiency and reducing waste. When servicing brakes, for example, use an alternative to traditional solvent sprays, with a brake cleaner that eliminates air-borne brake dust, VOC emissions and the headache of aerosol disposal. And when changing brake fluid, use a brake bleeding system that allows quick and easy changing of brake/clutch fluids.