

Driving force

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customers to be visited, avoiding wasted visits, changing customers' frequencies, combining several services and deliveries in the same visit or even alerting the sales department to adjust their prospecting areas, based on distribution optimisations."

And due to additional factors such as contract specifications and



consumption rates, it's no surprise key players – even manufacturers – within the water cooler industry are building programmes to suit their own routes, and selling it on.

"EWL is a logistics management system that has been developed specifically for the watercooler industry. Built on

Ebac's extensive knowledge of the market, and tailor-made to meet the day to day needs of operating a water business, the fully integrated software simplifies the entire administration process of customer orders to improve efficiencies and reduce errors," said Graham. "Furthermore EWL offers an optimised delivery management solution with synchronised electronic data capture and real

time visibility throughout operations."

Mapping the future

While gadgets are getting smarter, the customer's list of requirements is getting bigger. So where does electronic route optimisation go from here?

"The main focus in the software industry is definitely switching towards handheld software rather

Road Test

Kevin Zwolinski, Managing Director of logistics consultancy **Click-On Logistics** tells us why we can't afford to fall behind on route optimisation.

The concepts and use of route optimisation have advanced rapidly in recent years as a result of technology developments and enhanced offers from software vendors.

This development has happened in response to increasing complexity in supply chains, ever more dependent upon time-critical deliveries. Customer expectations continued to increase, with penalties applying to the operators if they missed their delivery window, or if they failed to achieve contracted key performance indicators (KPI). At the end of such a supply chain sat a transport planner trying to unpick the equivalent of a dozen Rubik's cubes at the same time, against the clock.

The role of an experienced planner is beyond question, they are worth their weight in gold; but take one of these experienced

operators and add the latest technology in route planning and optimisation, and now you have the ultimate set of tools at your disposal.

The real value of the latest technologies is in the integration capability of the various planning elements that need to take place upstream, ahead of the route planning activity. This extends from product master data, to rapid order processing capability, warehouse management, load planning, vehicle scheduling and then route planning. It doesn't stop there – on-board vehicle telematics systems to monitor vehicle and driver performance and, importantly, route adherence, and then electronic proof of delivery which can trigger immediate performance statistics.

According to the nature of the markets served, many of these variables need to be updated and reviewed on a daily basis by route, which puts a huge



Kevin Zwolinski

strain on operations planning. This can only be achieved effectively by using relevant technology platforms of which route optimisation software is pivotal.

Companies using these integrated technologies are experiencing benefits of 10% or more in the reduction of routes and vehicles required, and a vast increase in the accuracy of deliveries. The direct and indirect benefits are wide and various:

- Fewer vehicles on the road, less carbon emissions
- Lower costs
- Improved customer experience by using road traffic information to anticipate and

communicate potential performance problems such as road works or floods, where a partial re-route may be required

- More effective asset management and planning, especially for peak periods and for promotions
- Improved vehicle fill accuracy – the cost of 'overfilling' a load allocated to a vehicle can be onerous and result in poor customer service
- The working time directive can impose additional restrictions on feasible routes to comply with driver hours
- The ability to test 'what if' scenarios for alternative methods of delivery operations in a risk free environment (all of the latest software tools offer this planning option)

In summary, if these tools are not used by your service providers, you should be asking why. ■

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INSIGHT

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