

These days there are any number of technologies available for pushing out educational and safety-critical information to drivers, but the biggest challenge is getting them to actually engage. Many already feel harassed and micro-managed thanks to a plethora of telematics-based scoring systems, so adding yet more could be a recipe for disaster, reports Lucy Radley

Glen Davies, managing director of *The Driver Handbook*, has been in transport all his working life, so has seen for himself what happens when employers get it wrong. "I've got 23 years operational experience managing fleets, and I also spent 10 years with TfL [Transport for London] on its Freight Team," he reflects.

And his conclusion? "We invest a lot of time and money in vehicles and comparatively little in the drivers. My aim is to, hopefully, address that imbalance."

For many years now, operators have issued text-based driver manuals, usually produced in-house, and which often end up slung in the back of a locker and forgotten about. Viewed against a backdrop where everything from the Yellow Pages to the Argos Book of Dreams is now digitised and accessible through a phone, it does seem somewhat ridiculous that these rather dry affairs still exist. His product aims to correct that. It's made up of three components: a mobile app for the driver, a content management system (TDHConnect) for the transport office, and the content itself. The last is key: a straight copy of what used to be in a folder would, after all, be little



LOUD AND CLEAR

better than previous incarnations. "Our content has three authors," Davies adds. "Myself, with my transport background and experience; a qualified and up-to-date health and safety expert, and my operations director [and wife] Karen Davies, whose expertise is in communication."

Between them, these authors aim to produce content which is useful, relevant and, above all else, engaging. All well and good, but the cynic can't help wondering what difference the format makes if it still sits unread – other than freeing up somewhere else for drivers to put their socks. But this isn't, so it's said, just a digitised book. That's the point.

ABOUT THE BOOK

"We've made sure the information is technically valid, but also in a format and language that's easy to read," Davies says. "It provides a baseline of information which can then have anything operationally-specific added to it by the subscriber." Operators can create articles, push out toolbox talks and send notifications to their drivers, all via the content management system at the back end. Then, in addition to the information itself, the app shows a

'percentage read' score for each part, visible to the drivers themselves, and to managers via the CMS.

Also included in the app are 'Knowledge Checks', something which immediately prompts a raised eyebrow: after all, what professional driver will take kindly to being tested on often many decades of experience, in the same manner as a schoolchild? Responds Davies: "We can make sure the Knowledge Checks are fun, distributed as quizzes rather than 'assessments.' One thing we're seeing with some drivers is they actually like to show off how much they know. There's a real technique in writing Knowledge Checks."

Davies is also ex-military, his roles having included training and assessment design within military training, so he uses the same tried-and-tested techniques learnt there. "They're written so drivers can use them as a demonstration of their knowledge, rather than something trying to catch them out. That's our tactic."

Before building the *The Driver Handbook* – which is in its second generation now, the management system having been completely rewritten and upgraded for release this year – the team looked at a range

"We invest a lot of time and money in vehicles and comparatively little in the drivers. My aim is to, hopefully, address that imbalance"

Glen Davies



But what happens if, after all this effort, additional material uploaded by operators is back at the same low standard of the original printed handbooks? "There is a danger of that," Davies concedes. "But we do sample checks and, if we spot something, we'll advise - or sometimes even offer to amend on their behalf." The Driver Handbook is available in several forms, catering for HGV, PCV, van and 4x4 fleets. A specific forklift truck version is also on the horizon.

ANOTHER DIMENSION

This example is by no means unique in its aims. More and more professional app providers accept that ensuring engagement isn't easy, but it is vital. The common denominator amongst those who can prove success, however, is the one thing Glen Davies doesn't talk about: financial reward. Like it or not, in most cases even the most sceptical of drivers will suddenly become far more receptive if you pay them to be so.

For example, telematics provider Trakm8 has been working with nationwide glass repairer Autoglass, using its Connect 330 tracking device and RoadHawk dash cam. Amongst other things, the aim has been to reduce

accidents and, hence, downtime in the mobile fitting fleet, via encouraging safer driving practices. "The Trakm8 Connect 330 has helped our fleet make gains in many areas," fleet manager Andrew Ertl confirms. "We've improved our fleet's overall driving score to an industry-leading level, while reducing costs accrued from accidents, insurance claims and vehicle idle time."

The devices, like many telematics offerings, issue drivers with scores based on things like speed limit compliance and idling times. This enabled Autoglass to design 'a scheme to recognise and reward drivers that consistently achieve perfect scores in driving behaviour, speed limit compliance and idling time, contributing to an even greater improvement in driver behaviour.'

Along the same lines is the initiative by container haulier Maritime Transport, again using telematics scoring to flag up poor driving behaviour. Based on a system which grades drivers from A-G on key performance indicators such as fuel efficiency, braking and acceleration, scores rose dramatically: in 2020, 99.4% of drivers finished the year with A-C grades across all parameters.

Very impressive, but it would seem the main driver for this improvement was straight financial reward. At the end of the year, Maritime issued over 2,000 of its drivers with bonus payments averaging around £600. Another 69 who hit the top grades and remained incident-free for the year received an additional £1,000.

Make no mistake, Maritime puts a lot of time and energy into its driver training programme, employing a number of full-time driver trainers across its depots nationwide. But training drivers is one thing; getting them to engage with that training, then put it to use on a daily basis is another. Make it worth their while, however, and the goalposts move a whole lot closer to a place that is ultimately in everyone's best interests. **TE**

of apps drivers already accessed by choice. This included the BBC news app, The Sun, and many similar sites. "We needed to make sure our content wasn't patronising. We do find a lot of handbooks where information is dumbed-down," Davies tells us. "Operators do need to evidence the fact they've informed drivers on certain subjects, but it's making sure content is at the level of the professional."

Videos and updates from government sources can also be pushed out through the CMS.

