

# Thinking Global

## Data and technology can make a difference when deploying fleets across borders

Global fleet management companies, technology and access to real-time data can provide insights on trends and issues pertaining to vocational fleets, whether they run across provincial and state lines or internationally, and even the vehicles themselves, the products they carry and the services they perform.

“Think global and deploy local—insight into all of these factors is critically important for fleets to be efficient and productive and more importantly, SAFE!” says Sherry Calkins, associate vice-president, strategic partners, Geotab Inc., which manufactures and supplies GPS fleet management solutions to local and Fortune 500 companies in more than 100 countries on seven continents. “Technology will play a huge role in our ability to efficiently, safely and sustainably transport goods and people.”

The worldwide trend to corporate consolidation and globalization has increased demand for cross-border transportation and since fleet operations touch virtually every part of every business, countless departments and employees need information: operations, dispatch, legal, IT, security, human resources, procurement, training, compliance, environmental health and safety, unions and workers councils and more.

“Knowledge and information—

what a business doesn’t know presents the greatest risks,” says Rob Hill, multinational business development liaison, ARI, which provides fleet management services and consulting globally. “If you have visibility and transparency, you have the information you need to control everything from cost to your fleet’s ability to meet the needs of internal and external customers.”

Technology is the key to gathering and analyzing information, but integrated systems can be a challenge, since most systems run on closed-end not open platforms, which means data can’t be transferred in or out. Open-platform telematics, such as Geotab’s solutions, can be integrated with partners, such as Ford, GM OnStar, Navistar, Cummins, Seeing Machines, Nauto, ActSoft and AssetWorks, with all data brought into one view for visibility, reporting and analytics. As well, not every country on every continent has the connectivity and infrastructure required to support technology solutions such as telematics.

“International fleets need secure, scalable solutions to provide consistent visibility and vehicle data to manage logistics, routing and asset uptime while ensuring compliance with an extraordinarily diverse range of regulations country to country,” says Calkins. “Increasingly,



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trucking fleets need to integrate information, from freight and warehousing information to freight matching and digital on-demand freight in a complex delivery and transportation world whose future depends on integrated data and systems.”

### Think regionally

When multinationals lack fleet expertise, local or global, fleet management companies and their networks provide access to technology partners and local representatives that understand regional regulatory priorities, cultural challenges, and in specific markets, differences in vehicle and driver availability, training and safety.

diverse countries may share similar problems and while best practices developed elsewhere are likely to work in most countries, that’s not always the case.

“If you’re told a best practice won’t work in a particular area, you need to find out why because an issue with regulations or product or service availability might be overcome with nuanced changes,” says Hill.

Vocational fleets that include highly specialized vehicles, for example, a cement mixer, a refrigerated truck, a cherry picker or a vehicle with generator, delivering time-sensitive products and services, represent a significant cost. Vehicle availability may also be an issue, for example, pick-up trucks which are ubiquitous in North America, are far less common in Europe. Additional upfitting and customization can double and triple the initial cost. These specialized vehicles are also more complex to maintain and repair and require highly trained drivers.

“No two configurations are the same and they can vary greatly from manufacturer to manufacturer,” says Calkins.

The safety features that are typically standard equipment in North America are often not available in certain countries because OEMs don’t offer them and they’re not mandated by government. Likewise, road safety is often lacking in certain regions with less stringent regulations, and basic infrastructure such as well-maintained roads, proper lanes, traffic lights and signage.

While vocational fleets are inherently more complex than your average car fleet, the overriding premise is incredibly simple: What does the fleet and this specific vehicle need to do to

meet our company’s core business objectives?

“One size fits all never works—start with the premise that it has to be fit for the purpose, then consider a particular country or geographic regions’ unique requirements,” says Hill.

### Know the job

Whether companies manage their vocational fleets in-house or outsource them to fleet experts such as ARI, they need to know what their employees and customers need the vehicles to do. For example, a generator truck may be required to provide power in remote oilfield locations or a boom truck might be needed to lift heavy, sometimes unconventionally shaped objects from location to location. Beyond these capabilities, vehicles likely need to comply with weight, height and width restrictions, emissions standards and withstand or adapt to unique, or harsh environmental conditions such as extreme heat or cold, or dust.

“The initial focus must be on fit for purpose,” says Hill. “Fleets often end up with the wrong vehicles, because they didn’t ask the questions or ask the right questions.”

Generally, Canada, the US and many European nations are extraordinarily well-developed, but elsewhere, the questions will change. A telecommunications fleet in Bhutan may need to carry different parts and equipment than comparable service trucks in more developed nations.

“We ask questions that will allow us to walk away knowing the exact job function of every vehicle in each country in which the fleet operates,” says Hill.

Certain basic questions will remain the same, but a company

### Global vocational fleet management strategies:

- 1 Identify a consistent global safety program
- 2 Leverage telematics and data analytics to ensure visibility and transparency
- 3 Consider consolidated systems and open platforms as a value chain pre-requisite
- 4 See fleet as a revenue generator not a cost centre
- 5 Leverage predictive analytics, machine learning and artificial intelligence to transition to predictive from reaction management

that operates in 45 countries will need to tailor the questions based on the country’s level of sophistication pertaining to corporate culture, environmental sustainability, infrastructure, technology, telephony and more. In certain parts of Europe and North America, corporate culture and emissions standards combined ensure CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are a much-discussed fleet topic. Emissions and congestion in city centres around the world are resulting in regulatory restrictions that block off certain streets or routes and allow deliveries and trucks only at certain times of day. More broadly, regulations may apply to the vehicles and their engines.

“The last-mile delivery is really the challenging one and companies like Amazon, DHL, UPS and FedEx are finding ways to better comply with that,” says Calkins.

A smaller vehicle and engine will reduce the carbon footprint and fuel consumption, but it’s a viable option only if they can still do their job, for example capably carrying or towing half a tonne of equipment. Under-equipping or over-equipping vehicles is a poor use of capital and other resources and negatively affects fleet performance. Fleet managers must keep in mind that corporate sustainability and the companies’ responsibilities to shareholders and customers need to come first.

Driver shortages are a big

concern for every business right now and companies are relying on cameras, such as the Geotab GO device to monitor driver behaviour and identify training needs.

“Telematics and analytics offer so many tangible benefits, but very strict privacy laws, for example in Germany, can restrict or prohibit their use,” says Calkins. “Fleets need to be very aware of the data privacy regulations which vary greatly nation to nation and of the legal resources required to address related issues.” **FM/SP**