

Putting sustainability at the heart of business

Increasing legislative demands and shifting customer expectations have put 'green' back on the boardroom agenda. This white paper considers the role technology can play in helping firms to drive differentiation through a commitment to environmental issues.

Going green for future success

With the global economy in a state of flux, business is faced by a somewhat uncertain future. However, one trend that appears set to continue on an upward curve is the growing importance of the green agenda.

More stringent legislative controls on environmental output may have forced the issue but there has also been a realisation that such initiatives are key in establishing an organisation as a valued, forward-thinking partner.

This year, atmospheric proportions of CO₂ were measured at 400 parts per million for the first time in history and are predicted to rise further. The business response to this worrying milestone will come under serious scrutiny, particularly as customers, shareholders and industry regulators are increasingly demanding a demonstrable commitment to sustainability.

By embracing change from the outset, organisations will be better placed to achieve a competitive foothold in a market that will increasingly be defined by its ability to cope with carbon constraints.

A responsible approach to environmental issues also acts as a powerful exercise in brand building. Communicating a company's ethos and values through marketing and advertising is a tried and tested formula but a demonstrable commitment to sustainability can be even more effective in proving a brand's credentials.



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A focus on fleet

Vehicle fleets inevitably contribute to companies' carbon emissions and are therefore a key area of focus when looking for ways to improve environmental performance. Making this happen requires good planning, but it is achievable – and in ways that will help businesses realise considerable tax and fuel cost savings.

The equation is simple. Greater efficiency means lower fuel consumption, which in turn equals reduced costs and emissions levels. Tackling the issue simply requires consideration of the fixed and variable overheads.

The vehicle fleet is the fixed element and upgrading it by purchasing or leasing more fuel efficient vehicles can have a considerable impact. The cost of doing, however, may frequently prove financially prohibitive and cannot easily be done overnight.

How the fleet operates is the flexible element and this can easily be addressed through analysis of the appropriate data.

Purchasing or leasing an eco-friendly fleet: a fixed asset investment

A company's fleet replacement policy should have a green criterion and be flexible enough to take advantage of constantly evolving technologies. The automotive industry around the world is competing to produce cleaner and greener vehicles but making the right choice requires all salient facts at a company's fingertips.

It is essential to know precisely what distances vehicles cover each day, how they travel between site locations and what they do on arrival. This information can now be generated by a fleet management technology system, providing the necessary insight to make informed decisions or make the business case for change.

In addition to enhancing business reputation and delivering operational cost savings, companies should also consider the benefits offered by government's green fiscal incentives. These do not start and end with lower tax liabilities. Incentives range from Congestion Charge discounts to capital contributions towards the cost of new vehicles.

Eco-friendly fleet operations: the flexible choice

Slashing CO₂ emissions need not be dependent upon upgrading to fleet vehicles with superior fuel efficiency. Instead, by focusing on how vehicles are used, immediate results can be delivered no matter the size, nature and make-up of a fleet.

Implementation of smart job allocation and scheduling is a perfect start, helping reduce overall mileage and carbon footprint. Dispatching the most appropriate mobile workers to jobs requires accurate management information. This will range from assessing the urgency and priority of jobs to the location of employees and traffic flow en route.

Advanced fleet management systems, which combine tracking, navigation and live traffic information, enable managers to make decisions by monitoring vehicle locations, movements and driver performance. Jobs can then be allocated to the most appropriate field operative based on who will arrive quickest. The optimal route may not necessarily be the shortest but will be the one which minimises fuel usage, idling and time spent on the road.



Historic road-use data can also be analysed to avoid wasted mileage, while drivers are able to avoid congestion by using live traffic information provided by navigation devices. Coupled with smart routing, factoring in not only congestion but also traffic lights, roundabouts and other obstacles, this can mean journey time savings of up to 15 per cent – and a marked reduction in emissions.

Green efficiencies through improved driving performance

Positively influencing driving behaviour can lead to swift and effective results. Harsh cornering or braking, idling and speeding are driving characteristics that have a significant negative impact on fuel consumption, not to mention driver safety and vehicle maintenance costs.

A fleet management system provides insight into these elements by measuring the major factors affecting safe and efficient driving, enabling managers to measure live data taken directly from vehicles. Moreover, all of this information can be reviewed retrospectively or in real time, for individual employees or entire fleets.

Consequently, detailed performance profiles can be built for each driver, facilitating the establishment of company-wide KPIs. Companies are able to identify trends or problem areas, allowing efficient driving to be rewarded or training time and budget to be allocated more precisely.

Drivers can even receive immediate feedback on their driving style through audible alerts provided by the in-cab navigation device, allowing behaviour to be tackled at source.

Protecting the environment, your drivers and your bottom line

Beyond information on driving style, advanced fleet management solutions also provide insight into how the vehicle is performing too by reporting trouble codes directly from the engine.

If a vehicle is low on oil or has an engine fault, management can be immediately notified to ensure problems are quickly fixed. Keeping a vehicle well maintained will have a positive effect on fuel consumption and, of course, the safety of the user.

Such data allows companies to be fully accountable for their green policies, providing proof requirements are being met and offering a firm rebuttal to any accusations of 'greenwash'.

Managing mileage, driving behaviour and vehicle performance will not only protect the environment, it will also protect drivers, brand image and a company's bottom line. The result is an organisation better equipped to ride economic uncertainty.

