

Marten Transport started a Facebook page for the same reasons most trucking companies do: driver recruitment, outreach and just to have a presence in the world of Web 2.0. The Mondovi, Wis.-based refrigerated truckload carrier didn't expect it to change company pay policies... twice.

"[Facebook] is playing a lot of roles. We built it to attract drivers, but it has turned into so much more," said Tim Norlin, director of recruiting at Marten. "It has taken open-door policy to a whole new level."

The first change happened in 2010, when the downed economy was idling many drivers on long layovers. Instead of the usual phone and face-to-face complaints, company drivers started airing their grievances on Facebook, or effectively in public. It became obvious it was an issue for many, many company drivers. In response, Marten raised layover pay from \$25 per day to \$100.

Then, two months ago, drivers began complaining on Facebook about detention pay, which was forwarded on to drivers only when (and if) the shipper paid. A chorus of angry voices got that to change, too. Marten now pays drivers for detention time regardless of shipper behavior.

No doubt about it: Technological development, both on and off the truck, is changing drivers and the job. Marten's case is only one example. Today's tech-savvy driver is both more monitored and more autonomous, more privileged than ever, but also more demanding. Fleets should be conscious of where their workforce is headed, especially

when the winds of change are blowing from every direction.

Despite the still-struggling economy, driver turnover is already on the upswing, and many experts predict the coming of the worst driver shortage the industry has ever seen. As the trucking industry reaches out to a new generation of drivers to fill the gap, those that know how to speak their high-tech language may have an edge in getting the best and brightest.

Some carriers have taken to advertising their savvy selves to drivers.

features are a huge plus.

While these things may increase the productivity and comfort of company drivers, saving time may be particularly important for companies contracting owner-operators. For them, time is more literally connected with money.

On this front, a feature gaining popularity is in-cab scanning and document transmission. Drivers don't have to take their paperwork to a truckstop scanning station and wait in line. It also means bills move through the system faster, meaning the driver gets paid sooner.

Tomorrow's high

Technology on and off the truck can help fleets recruit and retain a new breed of tech-savvy, safer drivers

Recruiting

Making drivers' lives easier is one of the primary benefits of technology that can be leveraged by human resources departments, which are increasingly turning to social networking and recruiting websites alongside the more traditional print and broadcast ads.

In addition to having a presence online and on Facebook, Marten advertises the fact that the entire fleet has been equipped with electronic logs and GPS navigation.

"Drivers want something that is going to make their job easier," said Norlin, adding that any time-saving

Many of the technologies in the cab are not only appealing to drivers, but also save the carrier money. GPS, for instance, finds the best routes and keeps drivers there. According to John Pope, chairman of Cargo Transporters, Claremont, N.C., electronic onboard recorders have made his company safer, which also translates to money saved.

In-cab scanning is saving Marten huge amounts of money by eliminating trips to properly equipped truckstops. "If you have one driver driving 20 miles to a truckstop, then 20 miles back, at a dollar a mile, times 2,200 trucks, times five times a week – that is a lot of dollars," said Norlin, whose drivers love in-cab scanning.

Don't blink

Using technology as a recruitment tool is new territory for both carriers and drivers, especially when it comes to newer innovations that drivers may not be familiar with. Some carriers have found that as drivers learn

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tech truckers



more, being high-tech is actually a great tool for retention – the other side of recruitment.

“Often times, drivers [who left] will come back and say the other company was 15 years behind,” said John Pope of Cargo Transporters.

Cargo Transporters offers Qualcomm MC200, in-cab Wi-Fi and in-cab scanning. Their turnover rate after 10 months in the fiscal year is 29.9%, impressive in an industry plagued by turnover rates that can breach 100%.

that don't keep up will inevitably fall behind, especially as drivers begin to demand better everything – and the driver shortage is likely to empower them on that front.

At least one company is already planning for that. Xata is developing a product it calls Passport. The mobile tool will allow drivers to keep track of their CSA scores, among other things, and through social networking, it will allow the driver to compare himself with other drivers. Creating a ladder in this way is

every single day. They don't want to be out on the road, and they don't want to be sleeping 12 inches from where they work all day.

Steve Rush, president of Carbon Express, a 50-truck tanker fleet on the East Coast, contrasts today's drivers to his younger self.

“I always really enjoyed going out and seeing different things,” Rush said. “Today's drivers don't want to be out there days and weeks on end.”

Rush hasn't figured out yet how to do day-trips only. He did, however, get rid of all his sleeper cabs a few years ago and started putting drivers up in motels. “Our turnover has gone right out the window,” Rush said, adding that the extra capacity has allowed him to compete his way through the recession, and make more money.

Similarly, Cardinal Logistics has changed its operations in recent years to be primarily daytrips. As a result, their turnover, too, has dipped significantly. As the driver supply tightens, the company hopes to use that fact to recruit people from other industries, construction for example.

“It is not a lifestyle change; it is just the same as any other job,” said Lance Merklein, vice president of risk management.

Of course, every carrier is different, and must use different ways to leverage their assets in enticing modern drivers. But whatever carriers decide to do, they had better do something. Viable solutions for recruiting and retaining drivers will likely be dynamic, changing with demands as they arise. What is for sure, though, is that nobody will stay the same.

“If we operate like it is 1988 and do check calls, it is not going to work,” said Norlin.



In-cab scanning finds fans among drivers both young and old. It saves time and gets them their money faster.

Of course, technology has a way of advancing the goal post very quickly. Today's fantastic improvement will likely be tomorrow's standard.

Take GPS, for example. A decade ago, not too many carriers were equipping cabs with on-board units, and audible turn-by-turn directions were still, shall I say, around the bend. Today it's common, and drivers have gotten used to that.

“Drivers expect to have the navigation [tools], that is just a given,” Norlin said. “Carriers need to provide that.”

Trucking companies should get used to the technology “arms race” as just another rule of the game. Those

designed to give drivers with good stats a little bit of extra leverage when shopping around for a job. (Or give them a little extra chutzpah when writing complaints on your Facebook page.)

Beyond technology

There is an unexpected counter-current in the driver tech revolution.

Given the right (cheap) tools, a driver can video chat with his family on the road. He can text with his children. He can reach pretty much anyone whenever he feels the need. But that doesn't replace good old-fashioned family time, and drivers are demanding more of just that





Technology, CSA, and a culture of safety

Technology is not only changing what the driver looks for in the job, but also what the job looks for in the driver. On the most basic level, with cabs loaded with EOBRs, interactive maps, scanners etc., carriers need drivers who are comfortable using all that equipment.

More importantly, though, many recent technological innovations revolve around safety. Speed limiters keep trucks from cruising dangerously fast. Collision avoidance systems, such as forward-looking radar and lane departure warning, have to the power to prevent accidents in real time. EOBRs help ensure that drivers don't cheat, or simply make a mistake, and become tired. Communications technology puts help at arm's length.

The effect of these developments is tangible: The industry is the safest it has ever been.

Most of these advances have one thing in common – they are restrictive. A speed limiter, or rollover pre-

vention system, assume a (human) driver shortfall, and compensate accordingly. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's new CSA enforcement system, and the technological backbone that makes the system work, seems on the surface to be more of the same. In real

Research shows that making 'chores' socially competitive is a sure-fire way of provoking behavioral change.

terms, it forces drivers and carriers under threat of penalty to be safe.

But something more important, more fundamental, is emerging because of CSA: a socially competitive safety environment.

Area Transportation, a Chesterton, Ind.-based flatbed carrier and part of ADS Logistics, is one of the first carriers to leverage CSA scores to offer drivers bonus pay if they maintain good safety records. The recently adopted policy promises drivers up to a 2% pay boost above the stan-

dard 27% of load value pay rate. The size of the bonus fluctuates with a driver's score.

The program is still in the rollout phase, so the ultimate effect is still unknown. However, it holds promise on multiple fronts. In addition to its potential to attract more and better drivers, the program is also designed to boost compliance among drivers the company already employs.

"[It's a] reward to keep their CSA scores low, instead of it being a penalty," said Mark Andersen, fleet manager. "If the driver is on the borderline, we are trying to show it as an incentive."

At Area Transportation, a good score means more pay – positive reinforcement that is different from what the industry has seen so far. As the driver shortage heats up, those incentives might get even bigger if carriers begin to fight it out over the industry's best.

But that's not all. CSA, with its safety data on drivers and carriers alike, has created new opportunities for technology. Xata is seizing on that opportunity with its upcoming driver-centric product, Xata Passport.

Xata Passport is unique in two ways. First, it gives drivers the autonomy to control their own scores.

This, said the company, will give drivers leverage in seeking employment. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it allows drivers to directly compare themselves and their safety scores to other drivers – a potentially game-changing development.

Research in a field called behavioral economics shows that making "chores," such as being more safety-conscious, socially competitive is a sure-fire way of provoking behavioral change. There are plenty of non-

trucking examples of this working, and working very well.

Consider this: In the age of climate change and rising energy costs, everyone knows it's a good, responsible decision to save energy. Actually getting people to do it is a bit more difficult. However, one company seems to have figured it out. Oopower, a growing cleantech firm, partners with energy companies to provide billing with a twist. Instead

of simply stating the amount of energy you use, it compares you with all of your neighbors, and rates you against them. It introduces a measure of competition. The effect is amazing. Launched in 2007, the company has so far helped customers save \$30 million in energy costs, and eliminate 500 million pounds of CO₂.

CSA sets the stage for the same type of social awareness and competition, with people's jobs at stake on

top of it. Area Transportation and Xata are only among the first companies to capitalize the idea.

"CSA is really causing a culture change... without people knowing it," said Steve Rush, president of Carbon Express, a 50-truck tanker fleet on the East Coast.

As one trucking exec put it, "the cowboy guys are becoming dinosaurs quickly."



on the Driver Shortage

If you bring up the challenges of carriers today with any fleet manager, the topic of driver shortage is almost certain to come up. What's troubling is that we are only seeing the beginnings of it – the clouds are looming large on the horizon.

When we asked our 2011 Truck Fleet Innovators for their take on the shortage, both Chad England, chief operating officer of C.R. England, and Vin McLoughlin, chairman of Cardinal Logistics, referred us to the recruitment and retention experts within their organizations.

"Right now it is the calm before the storm," said Tom Pronk, vice president of recruiting, training and

safety at C.R. England. "It is going to get a lot tighter and a lot harder as things start to improve."

But the questions remains: What to do? How can carriers steel themselves? There is no single answer, and there are many facets to the problem.

There are some general strategies to keep in mind – number one is getting the drivers there in the first place.

A different approach to driving school

"We rely on our schools as a mechanism for getting drivers in," said Pronk.

C.R. England operates four schools throughout the country, and

although there is significant cost to that, there are very real benefits.

Foremost is that as a company school, C.R. England's training centers are not operated on a for-profit basis, which means they offer rates significantly lower than schools-as-a-business, according to Pronk.

There are other companies that offer driving school for free, but that means you're agreeing to a job there. At C.R. England, the prospective driver gets a job lined up for him at the end of the course, as well as the freedom to go somewhere else if he chooses.

In addition, C.R. England's Salt Lake City headquarters has what Pronk describes as a "mini-city," with

stores, an exercise facility and even a barbershop. The company recently launched a Driver Services Department whose only concern is driver issues and complaints.

According to Pronk, that ensures problems get addressed immediately.

That's all well and good, but there are a lot of potential employees out there. Where do you find the good ones?

Hit the pavement

According to Lance Merklein, vice president of risk management at

"The supply chain will have to be rethought based on how we recruit drivers."

Cardinal Logistics, you have to know where to look.

"A driver worth his salt is not going to be looking in the classified ads," Merklein said.

Cardinal has taken an entirely different approach to driver recruitment. Instead of placing ads in trade magazines and newspapers, he has his recruiters hit the pavement. Their

duties include getting out into communities attending local events in search of potential drivers.

This way, the company can go directly to people that hold promise – and a real community presence means drivers know exactly where to look for a job.

The lifestyle problem

While this is good food for thought in the short term, the driver shortage could become large enough to cause industry-wide changes in recruiting practices, and perhaps even in the ways that carriers do business. Although there has been an ongoing grab for the best talent out there, C.R. England's Pronk thinks the focus has to change.

"[Those guys] that have been doing it for a little while and they aren't sure if this is the place they want to be... we need to keep that group," Pronk said.

Pronk thinks that as the economy improves, a lot of those people will consider jobs in similar sectors, such as manufacturing, that have softer benefits like home time. In fact, some workers may be willing to take a pay cut if it means being at home every night.

"I want to work, I want to have a good income, but I also want to do A-B-C in my life as well," said Pronk, characterizing the youngest generation of truckers.

Creating the type of trucking job that caters to that mindset is an enormous challenge, and one that the industry will inevitably face. Merklein, who agrees with Pronk, thinks it will take fundamental change in the way carriers operate.

"The supply chain will have to be rethought based on how we recruit drivers," Merklein said. "A lot of people just don't want to sign up for the lifestyle." n

Dealing with pushback

There's more than enough room on the technology bandwagon, but as always, some people just refuse to get on. For a carrier pushing toward the future, it can be a significant obstacle to reaching full speed. There are two ways of dealing with this (somewhat generational) problem.

The first is plain old patience.

"The younger guys are more technology oriented," said Prime Inc.'s Don Lacy, talking about EOBRs. "And the older guys... at first they are a little skeptical, but once they get used to it, they like it better."

According to Lacy and many others, it is mostly older drivers who balk at the new technology because it's unfamiliar. The trick is getting them to realize how much easier it makes their job. Again, in the case of electronic logs, the driver essentially never has to think about hours ever again. You get in, get out, and the computer does all the number crunching. Steve Rush of Carbon Express said sometimes drivers just need a nudge.

"Once it is in there, wham!" said Rush. "They absolutely embrace it."

Rush claims to have gotten almost zero pushback on EOBRs, but he added a caveat: If a driver really digs his heels in against them, perhaps it's time to reconsider him as an employee.

Another thing to do is **make sure drivers are trained** adequately on new systems, whether they're reluctant or not. This can be particularly relevant if you're implementing an entirely new process, like delivery confirmation, because it may include a new duty as well as a new tool. If a driver is stumbling over an electronic form in the field, that can cost you money. However, technology can help here, too.

"We can essentially deliver training over the Qualcomm computer in the truck," said Lacy. "We've got training [videos] that can be downloaded off the site, if people want to re-familiarize themselves."

Finally, carriers might encounter a more basic modern terror: Fear of **Big Brother**. More than a few drivers out there are wary of things like critical event recorders, or instant back-office alerts when the brakes are stabbed. Unfortunately, there's not much you can do assuage the driver beyond simply telling him the truth.

"We are not here to be the Big-Guy-in-the-Sky," said Rush, mimicking a conversation with an employee. "We are here to help you become a better driver and a safer driver."