

Solutions

CASE STUDY ROADS SCHOLARS

Safety-first approach to trucking

A new system takes the guesswork out of the safety of tanker drivers and their dangerous goods while they are on the road, reports **Adam Turner**.

WHEN truckies are hurtling along the highway in the middle of the night, hauling enough aviation fuel to launch the space shuttle, the last thing you want them worrying about is paperwork.

By combining hand-held computing with satellite tracking, the Cootes Transport Group — Australia's largest carrier of dangerous goods — has eliminated paperwork for its drivers.

Cootes is part of the International Energy Services Group and provides equipment and distribution services to the dangerous goods industry, operating the massive tanker trucks filled with petrol, LPG, aviation fuel and other such substances that demand to be treated with respect.

Cootes' key clients include Shell, BP, Caltex, ExxonMobil, Elgas and Origin Energy, plus it also provides refuelling facilities at three of Australia's largest airports.

In a quest to reduce paperwork and improve delivery tracking, Cootes turned to InterDev's Xmotion Transporta system, equipping each truck with an Intermec CN3 hand-held computer and Minorplanet GPS tracking system to allow real-time status reporting. Installed in 70 vehicles throughout the country, and set to extend to 380 vehicles, the system uses the mobile phone network to lodge data directly into Cootes' back-end Freight 2020 transport management system, says Brett Wilson, Cootes' busi-

ness systems and processes manager.

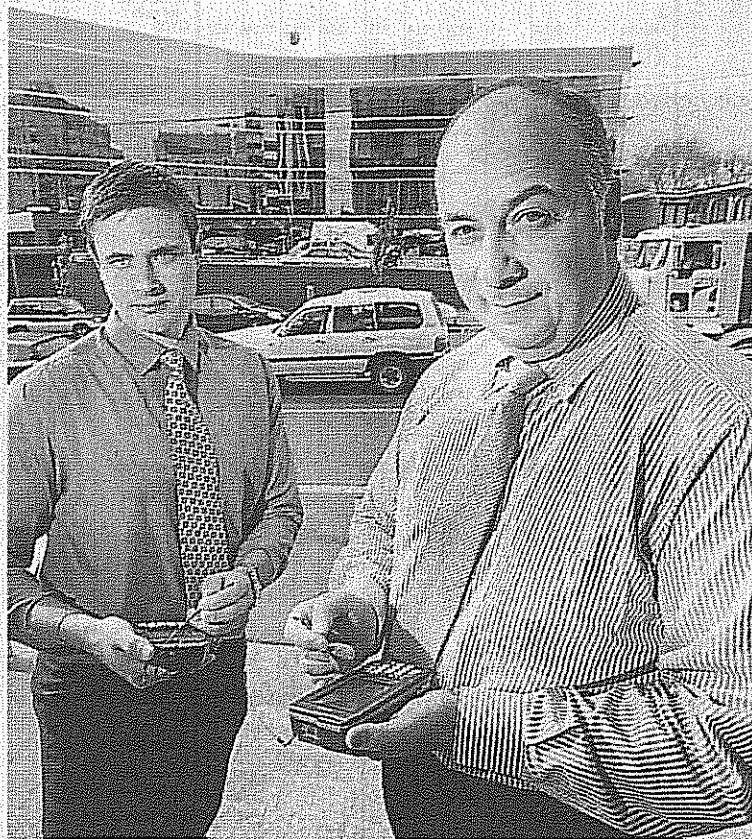
"Previously the drivers had been using a paper-based system, which required them to pick up their manifest from the contract manager at the depot, do all their deliveries and hand write everything," Mr Wilson says.

"Their pick up and delivery points can be up to five hours away, so the system relied on the driver to bring back that paper work and put it on somebody's desk. It could get lost or sit under a pile for a day before it was entered into the system. Where we see the real advantage now is that as soon as the driver finishes a delivery, they can enter the details on their device and click OK. Literally within a minute of hitting that button, the data is back into our freight management system ready for invoicing."

While the driver is on the road, the contract manager at the depot can use a web-based application to see where the truck is, if deliveries are complete and how much cargo is still in the tanker.

"The contract managers are able to calculate if there is product still onboard — thanks to the live data feeds from the hand-held — and can instruct the driver to deliver another drop rather than returning to the depot with product in the truck, which substantially improves efficiency and reduces operating costs," Mr Wilson says.

"If they chose to, the customer can also see much of that information as the delivery happens, as opposed to getting it 24-48 hours



Cootes' managing director Vin Stenta (right) with business systems and processes manager Brett Wilson are taking a hands-on hand-held approach to safety.

PICTURE: EDDIE JIM

NEXT LESSONS

Problem: Cootes' paper-based system made it difficult to track deliveries.

Process: Hand-held computers and GPS tracking allow deliveries to be tracked in real time.

Possibilities: The computer and GPS systems will be integrated to offer features such as hazard warnings.

later like when we had a paper-based system in place."

While real-time data is important, Australia's vast distances can make constant contact difficult. Rather than opt to use an expensive nationwide network, Cootes runs the Xmotion Transporta system over a standard GSM mobile phone network, with data stored on the hand-held and automatically uploaded as soon as the truck is back within range.

Through such close monitoring, Cootes can also ensure drivers adhere to safety regulations such as rest breaks.

"If we recognised the driver has been logged on for greater than five hours then they have to put in a break. We won't actually

let them send back the manifest details unless they acknowledge that part of the program," managing director Vin Stenta says.

"For phase two and three (of the project) we plan to integrate mapping data. We are looking at a company that supplied maps of all the speed limits on the streets and linking that to the Minorplanet GPS box in the truck. It can also alert drivers of driver dangers such as upcoming blind corners. It won't feature visual maps because the last thing we want a driver carrying dangerous goods to do is take their eyes off the road."

Rolling out a system such as Xmotion Transporta requires plenty of attention to training, says InterDev managing director Andrew Rossington.

"Technically you can be fantastic but if you don't get the buy-in from end users and the training right, especially within the transport sector, then it's going to go all wrong. At the driver level there can be resistance to change because they already know how to do their job as far as they're concerned."

LINK
► xmotion.com.au