Tablets drive dray visibility

Dunavant’s mobile devices linked to intermodal TMS empower contract drivers.

By Eric Johnson

Visibility has become so pervasive in the field of logistics management that it has largely obscured the fact that one major link in global supply chains continues to remain virtually opaque to shippers.

Drayage remains the veritable black hole when it comes to tracking the movement of containerized goods. The reason is not hard to ascertain: drayage companies and their salaried or contract drivers have had little to no incentive to invest in technology that can loop the dray leg into sophisticated transportation management systems.

So shippers largely cross their fingers and hope their boxes make it from the container yard to the distribution center or seaports and domestic rail operations. Together, the two developed a system that has put Android tablets in the hands of 300 Dunavant drayage drivers in the U.S. Gulf and Southeast regions. The tablets allow drivers to log into the system through a mobile app and get dispatch information automatically. The driver can then update his or her status through the app, eliminating the time-consuming back and forth with the dispatcher over whether the container has been picked up, discharged, damaged, etc.

“All these over-the-road carriers can get me real-time data,” he said. “Why can’t we get this on the drayage leg? It’s taking this data and making it mobile, but it needs the right infrastructure. I said it has to be a native application. If the driver goes into a dead zone (for cell service), it needs to be able to cache that data and resend it when he gets coverage. Jim had a prototype in front of me in six months.”

Rodriguez said the system can also be set up with geo-fencing so that if a driver crosses certain physical milestones, the goods need to make sure data concerning thefts is reported properly. Trucking firms should invest in more procedures and training of drivers on how to mitigate risk, and may consider shifting shipping schedules so trailers don’t sit unattended at truck stops for long periods.

“It takes everybody involved — manufacturers, shippers, logistics operators,” Greene said. “It takes a combined effort to mitigate this risk.”

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**MOL has also established a target to reduce CO2, NOx and SOx emissions by 10% by FY2015 vs. FY2009.**

*Global KPIs are international, regional KPIs are North American.*
Another benefit to the harbor area driver is that they are required to have the appropriate paperwork when they arrive at a port to pick up a container.

“Many times, the driver must drive to the terminal yard location to pick up the paperwork,” Hickman said. “With our electronic (proof of delivery) module, the driver receives his paperwork on the tablet, thus saving a costly trip to the office by going directly to the terminal to pick up his container.”

Drivers can use the tablets for more than just status updates and load locations. The camera has been integrated into the app to allow drivers to take pictures of documents, such as an out-gate receipt, which then automatically get converted into compressed TIFF and PDF files, which are then automatically archived in the TMS.

“Drayage companies are paper-intensive operations, now you need that. It’s more of a requirement because of the paradigm shift across the industry,” he said.

Hickman said the reason might be simpler.

“There’s still the mentality that the driver isn’t going to get it, that they’re not smart enough to work a device like this,” he said. “But companies need to ask themselves if they want to be ahead of the curve and ahead of the competition. I have 600 of these on the streets right now. The list is starting to pile up of people who want to get on board.”

For Rodriguez, the satisfaction is seeing the system take root which comes from his desire to turn industry traditions on their head.

“I enjoy disruption,” he said. “I enjoy looking at the industry and finding where we can shake things up. What we’ve done here is very unique. The more people I get on board with this concept, the more the standards get formed. I like being the first person to a market, but after a while, you need to get other people involved.”