How Automation Solves 10 Common Fleet Challenges

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Replacing laborious manual processes with automated workflows can transform an organization's fleet management plan.

To this day, many fleets are managed with spreadsheets and other paper-based processes that create inefficient workflows in the business. Traditional manual processes prevent operational efficiency and limit organizational growth due to their laborious and arduous nature, taking up precious resources that could be reallocated to more important tasks. **Some common challenges created by this include:**

- Time lost due to increased manual labor
- Rising operating costs
- Difficulty meeting compliance requirements
- Data-entry errors
- Wasteful storage of paper forms
- Vehicle security gaps
- Barriers to workplace collaboration

Fleet automation and digitization solves these pain points, especially in an era of rising operating costs. Let's take a closer look at how fleet automation helps improve overall operations for fleet-based businesses.

Pain Point 1

Time-consuming manual workflows

Managing the ins and outs of a fleet can be time consuming especially when it's underpinned by manual processes. Staff members are stretched thin on routine business functions, leading to bottlenecks that impede progress. **The right fleet automation solution solves an array of operational challenges using one single platform that include:**

- Digitizing key management – Control vehicle access from your mobile phone
- Reducing notification overload – Streamline data insights by connecting telematics, cameras, and fleet management systems
- Prioritizing tasks
- Reallocating resources

Companies are spending big on digital transformation – at a rate that will reach $2.8 trillion by 2025. According to a recent survey, 40% of companies expect to see positive results within two years. And 49% of fleets cited "reducing operating costs" as the top reason for the investment.[1]

Pain Point 2

Rising operating costs

The cost of managing a fleet is always increasing. This includes acquiring the vehicle, fuel to operate the asset, and conducting preventive maintenance to keep vehicles roadworthy, to name a few. Other so-called hard costs include license and registration, tolls, taxes, parts and labor, parking tickets, and waste disposal fees. There are also hidden costs such as lost productivity caused by downtime and rental fees for replacement vehicles.

As one example, rental operators are seeing increasing costs for background checks, driver verification, and other processes involved in getting a vehicle on the road from the lot. **Rental companies are now solving for higher costs by making their operations more efficient.**

According to industry trade publication, Auto Rental News, "While contactless rentals have been talked about for years, it was the pandemic that forced many operators to find ways to automate the rental process with digital keys and other technologies that made renters feel safer and kept cars in service while streamlining operations."

Also, fleet automation is a hedge against rising operating costs because it nearly eliminates wasteful resource deployment.

Pain Point 3

Excessive vehicle downtime

There's always a maintenance need lurking around the corner for fleet managers, even for more organized professionals who set up detailed preventive maintenance schedules. Some of these can be easy fixes, while others require new tires or engine service.

Keeping vehicles on the road remains a vital revenue element for fleet-based businesses. Roadworthy vehicles increase driver safety and improve efficiency by eliminating emergency dispatch calls for service.

Fleet automation platforms take the heavy lift out of this process, by identifying maintenance needs instantaneously and scheduling the necessary service based on the vehicle's health. This helps get vehicles back on the road more quickly to earn income for the business. Once repairs are scheduled, an automation platform can assign drivers a backup vehicle, so they experience little to no down time.

Pain Point 4

Confusing or cumbersome vehicle access controls

Access to vehicles can create bottlenecks, especially when managing motor pools. Reservation systems, scheduling conflicts, and physical key management often create confusion and lower utilization.

While digital keys have gained wider adoption with carsharing fleets, they provide access permissions for many other kinds of fleets. It allows fleet managers to grant or remove access based on role. And it takes away the manual task of handling physical keys, including the security ramifications in traditional key management.

Many other benefits come into play, including theft prevention and more effective maintenance management. Digital keys combat theft by replacing physical keys, which can easily be taken or lost. The technology also allows you to know if your vehicle is moving, but the authorized driver isn't behind the wheel, immediately flagging the vehicle as stolen.

In the event of a maintenance issue, digital keyless technology can help a delivery driver quickly switch to a replacement vehicle. The fleet manager can also provide the service crew access to the disabled vehicle, allowing for quick repairs and reduced downtime.

Pain Point 5

Security gaps

Vehicle theft remains a persistent problem that continues to surge higher each year, according to the National Insurance Crime Bureau. **In 2021, 932,929 vehicles were stolen in the U.S. – a 17% increase from 2019. Victims of this theft lost $7.4 billion.**[2]

That's why vehicle security is always a top priority. Vehicle thefts are costly, as are the time and costs required to recover the stolen vehicle.

Fleet automation relies on digital keyless access to enables security by:

- Immediately immobilizing a vehicle to prevent a theft in progress
- Restriction of vehicle access by role to ensure the right driver is in the right vehicle at the right time
- Identifying an unauthorized driver which prevents vehicle thefts
- Shorter time of vehicle recovery in the event of a theft from weeks to hours

While physical keys are associated with vehicles, digital keys are associated with drivers. **From 2016 to 2018, there were 209 vehicles stolen per day that had keys or fobs left in the vehicle.**[3]

Vehicles can be immobilized, even if an unauthorized user has the physical key. The vehicle's engine isn't stopped while the vehicle is in motion – instead, the engine wouldn't function on the next attempted start by an unauthorized driver.

Another feature automation enables is proximity locking, which allows a vehicle to lock when the driver exits without touching a key or mobile phone. With proximity locking, fleet managers can control vehicle access, auto locking distance and immobilization timing. These features make a fleet's vehicle more secure throughout duty cycles.

Pain Point 6

Notification overload

Fleet management systems can generate hundreds of notifications each day, requiring staff to sift, triage, and manually prioritize. These systems monitor various aspects of your fleet and provide information but no action.

This information overload can cause fleet managers to overlook critical information, which can lead to vehicle breakdowns, theft, and lost productivity in the form of additional downtime.

Fleet automation platforms, on the other hand, convert these alerts into automated workflows, which address, manage, and resolve critical issues. Fleet insights are then translated to automated actions, freeing up your staff to focus on other mission-critical needs.

Pain Point 7

Siloed data, too many logins

Fleet management technology often falters because telematics systems, cameras, maintenance scheduling, fuel monitoring, and other solutions only offer single-point solutions.

Oftentimes, they aren't linked to other operational data, which creates silos with multiple logins. Larger solution providers are pivoting to all-in-one solutions that come pre-integrated or creating data partnerships (via APIs) that link, for example, GPS location with various back-office workflows. But these partial integrations often don't go far enough.

Fleet automation connects all your fleet technology – including telematics, cameras, and management systems – so you can make more sense of data coming from drivers and vehicles, turning insights into action.

Pain Point 8

Vehicles in unsafe locations

Telematics solutions are great at providing GPS data so fleet managers know the location of their vehicles. But what about fleets that are only using a camera system to monitor risky driving or a maintenance management platform that provides preventative maintenance alerting?

Not all fleet management technology provides vehicle tracking via satellite or cellular. But, more importantly, knowing location helps fleet managers understand a vehicle's breadcrumb trail so they know whether to grant or prevent access if the vehicle is in an unsafe environment.

Fleet automation enabled by digital keys allows fleet managers to correlate the location of their vehicles with the individuals who are driving them. This is an example of managing drivers, as well as assets, to ensure safety is always a top priority.

Pain Point 9

A slump in customer service

Service businesses, including last-mile delivery fleets, rely on happy customers. When the package shows up two days late or not at all, customers vote with their fingertips – in the form of online reviews.

For a last-mile fleet, good customer service means getting the right package to the right customer at the right time. For example, a delivery driver using a digital key can grab the package and go without having to manually handle a physical key to lock or unlock the vehicle. For delivery services that are making 50 to 60 stops per day, these small time-saving moments can add up, increasing efficiency and shaving precious seconds off each delivery.

Fleet automation can improve almost every touchpoint a business makes with a customer, including increasing efficiency and productivity, ensuring roadworthy vehicles, preventing theft, and reducing downtime.

Pain Point 10

Technology that doesn’t speak your language

The cloud-based software platforms that underpin fleet management technology, and their associated dashboards, can seem like a one-size-fits-all solution that may not address the unique needs of a specific fleet.

For example, a rental company has very different needs than a last-mile delivery business. A rental business, for example, may want the flexibility to let customers return vehicles to various locations day or night, but move them to locations with higher demand.

Last-mile fleets benefit from proximity locking, so drivers can deliver packages without digging for physical keys, reducing delivery times and improving customer service and efficiency.

Whether your fleet is essential to running your business or your fleet is your business, fleet automation can make a major difference. **Automation leads to higher efficiency, which ultimately saves you time and money.**

Paving the Way to Implementing the Right Solution

When managed via spreadsheet, managing a fleet can impede an operation's efficiency. After a digital transformation, an organization can turn alerts and data into automated workflows, turning insights into action while eliminating manual processes and intelligently reallocating resources.

Implementing a fleet automation solution has many details that include everything from securing a budget to stakeholder buy-in and approval. **The 10 steps on the right pave the way to create a strategy to implement the right solution to begin your fleet's digital transformation journey.**

Checklist:

10 Steps to Fleet Automation Implementation

1. Determine your company's fleet-related goals and needs
2. Identify and secure budget dollars
3. Identify stakeholders and obtain buy-in and approvals
4. Research fleet automation vendors and conduct Q&A sessions to determine the best fit based on your goals
5. Compile a project team and identify scope, timeline, and tasks
6. Assign tasks based on team member strengths
7. Create a succinct Statement of Work (SOW) that details your goals, timelines, and milestones that all implementation team members agree upon
8. Identify an implementation leader to serve as the point person throughout the duration of the project
9. Conduct regular meetings to gather feedback, ensure the project is on-point and every member is accountable for their tasks
10. Reevaluate any set expectations, goals or tasks based on initial learnings to ensure the implementation smoothly stays on course

To learn more about how the Ridecell fleet automation solution helps fleet-based businesses stay productive, profitable and safe:

ridecell.com/fleet-automation

Sources

1. "The Impacts of Fleet Automation Solutions" infographic, Ridecell
2. "Automating Fleet Security" infographic, Ridecell
3. "Automating Fleet Security" infographic, Ridecell