

Case Study: PDQ Transport

Plant delivery company cuts scheduling time dramatically

An up-and-coming transport company can benefit from a mainstream routing and scheduling system like TruckStops just as much as a large one – and it works just as effectively with subcontracted vehicles as with those owned by the user-company. That's the conclusion of PDQ Transport, a United Kingdom-based company specializing in nationwide deliveries of plants. The company is less than two years old, and generally has a vehicle requirement of about ten vans a day (rising to 35 in the peak season), most of which are supplied by outside carriers. Yet managing director Peter Rawlinson says TruckStops has "transformed" the delivery planning process, "and will easily pay for itself many times over."

"Before we started using TruckStops, we were sometimes spending a whole day just scheduling the trips," Peter Rawlinson says. "And because we're very much a hands-on business, when we'd finished that job we'd have to go out and help with the loading as well. It meant some very long days, and hardly represented the best use of our time."

Not only does TruckStops speed up delivery planning, he says; it also streamlines the job of marshalling the plants into loads, ready for dispatch. As Peter's colleague Dave Rutter points out "The output from TruckStops serves as our picking list. It makes the warehousing job far easier and more organized. It takes the mess out of the job."

The company has found

TruckStops' recently-enhanced file export facility particularly helpful. Data can be output literally at the click of a button into Microsoft Excel format. "Then we can play with it in any way we want." This has allowed the company to print out picking lists, manifests and other paperwork in exactly the format it wants.

PDQ offers what is



TruckStops helps save time in building routes over manual routing

essentially a consolidation and redistribution service for plants, which may be grown in the UK or on the Continent. Peter Rawlinson likens it to a freight forwarding service for plants, adding that "you have to treat them as commodities." But he accepts that PDQ's success so far does stem from its extensive knowledge and experience of the industry. "We've never advertised. Customers just seem to get to know us."

Plants are mostly brought in by the growers or their carriers, and are then consolidated by PDQ and distributed nationwide, mostly to garden centers. The company uses several established carriers in its own area to provide the transport, as well as selected carriers. Their vehicles tend to bring in plants from

growers in their area, then return home with consolidated loads for distribution on the way back.

"One of the attractions of TruckStops is that it makes it easy to schedule specific vehicles to start or finish at somewhere other than the main operating base," Rawlinson points out. "So we can schedule outbased vehicles along with those from our own area."

Customer orders tend to come in by fax rather than more advanced electronic means, so they have to be keyed into

TruckStops manually.

"There's no way round that," Rawlinson says. However, the company has created a master file of delivery points, so it is relatively straightforward to allocate orders to recipients.

The business operates on a weekly cycle in which orders come in on Monday and Tuesday, reflecting sales during the previous weekend, and are then scheduled on Wednesday for delivery on Thursday and Friday. Many vehicles do two-day trips, typically making between eight and sixteen calls each. To even out the work flow, the company is now also beginning to take work involving collection of young plants from growers. This tends to be concentrated in the earlier part of the week, so it balances ideally with the deliveries later in

the week.

The company works from a converted glasshouse, which offers exactly the right environment for holding plants pending delivery. Some of the loading and unloading can be done under glass, protecting the plants from the weather, and there are raised loading banks to allow walk-in access to vehicles.

The plants are carried in standard "Danish trolleys", which can be broken down into compact form for returning to suppliers. PDQ has also become a holding point for these trolleys, handling consolidation and recovery of damaged units. The company's latest venture is a twice-weekly operation for a continental grower involving overnight deliveries of cut flowers direct to florists' shops. Another local carrier provides the vans, and drivers hold keys to the shops to allow them to gain access in the small hours.

Again, TruckStops is used to establish the optimum schedule for the vans.

"Originally we hoped we could do it on a standard 'milk round' basis," Rawlinson says, "but not all florists order every week, so we have to schedule individual journeys as they arise."

All vehicles used by PDQ's carriers are heated, since some plants need to be kept at around 54° F in the winter months. Some are also refrigerated. They are of varied size and all have tail-lifts.

Peter Rawlinson has had long experience in plant distribution. For some years he worked for Royal Sluis, a continental specialist. He gained firsthand experience of TruckStops here, and says this helped convince him it would be equally appropriate to his new venture.