THE ROAD AHEAD: The Future of Field Service Delivery

The 2012 Future of Field Service Delivery report investigates how service-based organisations are responding to the growing challenges facing their industry in 2012 and beyond. An ever-more competitive landscape means businesses are struggling to differentiate themselves to a customer base with expectations at an all-time high, empowered by a growing ‘review culture’ which is putting the image and reputation of brands into their hands through social networks. As the number of customer touch-points increases for every brand, services in the field are rapidly becoming the new frontline in the battle for competitive market share, playing a major role in customer satisfaction, brand reputation and, ultimately customer retention and profitability.

Adding to this, unpredictable fuel prices, incoming legislative requirements and environmental concerns make today a challenging time to run a service operation. Gathered from the most significant issues businesses with field service divisions are facing today, this report provides some valuable perspectives into how the future may look for businesses running fleet and mobile workforce operations and how their environment may change.

Businesses are demonstrating a solid awareness of the issues facing them, both now and moving into the future and the study identifies some key areas that demonstrate the approaches organisations are attempting to adapt to the new service imperatives.
The Strategic Importance of Customer Service

How much have field services evolved from playing a simple operational role to one of significant importance to the overall strategy of the brand? Our study found businesses are really beginning to shift their view, with a growing awareness that field service operations are a key driver of customer satisfaction, brand reputation and competitive advantage. At the same time, not every organisation has been able to deliver on its vision for field service excellence, and 60% felt that future improvements in customer service would need to be achieved with fewer resources.

Achieving Service Delivery Excellence

What steps are organisations taking to achieve customer service excellence and how successful are they? Our findings show organisations are investing in a number of initiatives to achieve this, including technology system upgrades; customer feedback programmes; safer driving initiatives and social media monitoring. However, the relative priority placed upon each area and the success achieved, varies widely between organisations.

The Role of Technology in Delivering Service Excellence

Technology is a critical component in maintaining efficient field-based operations. Yet while 88% of field service directors say that increasing workforce productivity and utilisation is an important strategic objective, fewer than one in five organisations in our study have achieved the field service utopia of fully-automated scheduling, dispatch and mobility systems to deliver real-time visibility and control of field service operations. Our study suggests that the need to integrate a diverse mix of often incompatible legacy systems is preventing many organisations from realising the full potential of technology to increase workforce efficiency, a crucial factor in achieving service excellence.

Managing the Mobile Workforce

The research shows that organisations really do value staff and realise their importance in achieving their business goals. 93% of respondents agreed that mobile workers are the ‘company face’ and an additional 89% consider field staff to be important for the image of the business. So it is not surprising that one of the biggest concerns of managers and directors with a field-based operation is finding the right staff, with the right skills.
Mitigating Risk

What are the measures field service operations are taking to reduce financial, legal and occupational risks? Health and safety is a high priority for businesses with employees out in the field, and has taken a much higher precedence over the last five years. Our study also identified a correlation between brand reputation and the field-based workforce, with 79% stating that driving skill is taken seriously by the company and is strongly linked to the representation of the brand in the public eye. All organisations place a high priority on managing risk, with a small but significant minority realising the benefits of telematics systems in terms of reduced collisions, lower insurance costs and more efficient fuel consumption.

Sustainability and the Green Agenda

Just what is driving sustainability in fleet services operations, and what are the resulting benefits to operators? Improving sustainability and delivering on the green agenda is a priority for the government, public sector organisations and businesses large and small, and our findings show that it’s no different for companies with a field-based workforce. Nearly two thirds of respondents believe that sustainability plays a key role in their business plan and a further 64% feel sustainability will have a significant effect on their business moving forward. Overall, our report suggests that the desire to become more sustainable is often, in part being driven by perception and company image.

The full report will include further research and findings across these business themes as well as a “Conclusions and Recommendations” section, which will offer insights for those involved in the management of field service operations, and provide a valuable steer for any organisation looking to achieve field service excellence.