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Case Study: Fast-Track Fleet

November 1, 2008

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Dave Stitz, vice president of finance for McAninch Corp., had what many contractors would consider a good problem—managing too many pieces of equipment across too many jobsites.

As one of the largest earthmoving and underground utility contractors in the Midwest, McAninch operates more than 400 pieces of equipment at dozens of project sites over seven states. Projects include transportation, residential, retail and recreational (such as golf courses). Until 2005, one dispatcher managed the movement of equipment from the company’s headquarters in Des Moines, Iowa, by spending all day talking to drivers and onsite managers on cell phones and two-way radios.



McAninch Corp. is using Trimble Construction Manager GPS hardware and software to closely monitor its fleet of mobile assets.

“It was impossible for us to actually see where all of our equipment was, and we could never be sure what they were doing, where they were going, or how many hours each one was running or idling each day,” Stitz says. “We knew that keeping a closer eye on our equipment would help us do a better job of planning and managing, and these days, the more efficient you are, the more competitive you are.”

Tracking Trucks

So three years ago, as a first step to more closely monitoring its fleet of mobile assets, McAninch implemented Trimble Construction Manager on 155 company pickup trucks and over-the-road trucks. The Trimble Construction Manager system consists of GPS-based positioning hardware and Internet-based software that enables accurate, efficient asset management. First, McAninch installed the GPS hardware on all of the vehicles; these units receive and store position coordinates from the GPS satellites and then wirelessly send packets of data to the central data server via cell phone tower.

Information on the central data server is accessed via Trimble Construction Manager software on any Internet-connected computer. So back in the office, dispatchers, managers and executives can view detailed data about each vehicle, including location, speed, idle time and more.

“We have 17 low-boy trucks that are almost always on the roads hauling equipment between jobsites all over the Midwest,” Stitz says. “Now, the dispatcher can plan his next move by watching the exact location and travel routes of each one on a Web browser in the office.”

McAninch executives invested in the software because they knew it would help them more efficiently manage their dispatch operations. But, they were pleasantly surprised to also find some unexpected benefits.

Now, McAninch executives can easily tell if a driver has taken a wrong turn, if he’s not on the correct route for an overweight load, or if he stops by his house during the middle of the day. According to Stitz, one of the most profitable unexpected benefits has come in the form of fuel efficiency.

“We’re able to print reports about vehicle idle times, which is saving us a lot of money with gas prices as high as they are,” he said. “And, now that we can see exactly when our trucks are in use, it’s cut down significantly on non-business use.”



Dispatchers, managers and executives can view detailed data about each vehicle using Trimble

Another way the asset management software is helping McAninch executives mitigate risk is by making it easy to identify who is speeding in company vehicles. Since adopting the technology, the company has implemented a strict policy to prevent drivers from speeding. Now, Stitz prints out a report once a week that identifies which vehicles were driven above the speed limit during the past seven days, and employees exceeding the speed limit are held accountable.

Although the increased visibility required a period of adjustment for McAninch employees, Stitz says the investment is even paying off for workers. “It’s a tough time to be in the construction industry, and everyone knows that if we’re not efficient, we’re going to be a casualty of the times,” he says. “We’re doing all of this for one reason—because it has a positive impact on

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Construction Manager software.

the bottom line, and our employees realize that us running an efficient business means job security for them.”

Monitoring More Machines

McAninch executives were so pleased with the results of the initial technology implementation that within six months they decided to increase their use of the software to manage their fleet of dump trucks, excavators and other rolling stock, as well as skid-steer loaders, four-wheelers, small trailers and other types of equipment that are most prone to theft.

In addition to managing assets and risk, company executives are using the data to keep better tabs on maintenance schedules, as well as to reconcile payroll, and they're continually looking for new ways to leverage the vehicle and equipment data that is now easily available.

As a next step, Stitz says they plan to add their entire fleet of heavy iron to the Trimble Construction Manager software solution. "Adding asset management technology to more of our equipment has been a natural progression for us because we're seeing so much benefit," he explains. "Eventually, we'd like to use the technology to monitor every piece of equipment on every jobsite."

SIDEBAR:

Contractor: McAninch Corp.

Location: Des Moines, Iowa

Web site: www.mcaninchcorp.com

Goal: To increase the efficiency of scheduling and dispatching equipment.

System Used: Trimble Construction Manager, www.trimble.com

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