

How CPS Centralized its Fleet Management Data

Once hampered by a legacy, DOS-based data system, Crop Production Services' fleet operations improved efficiency and productivity with an advanced enterprise system providing seamless multiple data stream integration.

By Cindy Brauer



When Stan Witkowski joined the Crop Production Services (CPS) fleet team in 2005, he faced a daunting task - research, choose, and implement a new fleet management software program to track and manage the company's leased and company-owned vehicles and equipment - some 15,000 pieces of rolling stock. In addition, this new program had to consolidate multiple assets from different systems and track the company's fuel and maintenance program - all with a user-friendly interface.

Then known as United Agri Products, the company has since

gone through change of ownership and acquisitions, growing to more than 800 U.S. retail stores and doubling its fleet units to more than 35,000, making Witkowski's software choice and implementation even more critical.

Headquartered in Greeley, Colo., CPS is the nation's largest agricultural inputs retailer and services provider, according to Witkowski, business systems manager for fleet. The company's products include crop nutrients, crop protection products, and a full lineup of seeds - "agricultural inputs," Witkowski explained. The company also provides fertilizer and chemical application services requiring specialized applicators and support equipment. The CPS vehicle fleet includes more than 4,900 predominantly light-duty trucks and 3,900 medium- to heavy-duty trucks. Other CPS fleet units include 22,000 trailers, tanks, and flat beds, tool bars, and other field equipment; 2,700-plus loaders/lift trucks; and 1,300-plus applicators. In addition to more than 800 U.S. retail locations, CPS operates three manufacturing facilities in Greeley; Billings, Mont.; and Greenville, Miss.

DOS-Based System Replaced

"One of the first things I was tasked to do when I was hired was to find fleet management software to replace our DOS-based flat software that could not track historically and had extremely limited visibility," Witkowski recalled.

From an initial dozen systems, he narrowed the field to five and requested a product demonstration from each. Two finalists were chosen as Witkowski pinpointed his system requirements. "When evaluating the two finalists, it was clear that one application could quickly and easily meet our lengthy list of requirements," he explained. "We had three primary goals: track gross spend per asset, increase visibility of our fleet for all levels of management, and become a paperless department."

Witkowski selected FleetWave, a Chevin Fleet Solutions product, citing the system's easy customization and robust asset tracking capabilities. "FleetWave provides customer ownership of the application, and they do a lot of initial customization to meet your specialized business processes," Witkowski explained. Essentially, he said, CPS has an "enterprise license," without limits on assets or users. Hosted on the CPS corporate site, behind the company's firewall, the system is centrally administered and deployed over CPS' Intranet.

The system officially "went live" in first quarter 2006.

For Witkowski, a critical element of a seamless data management program is the ability to input data changes throughout the system "without going back to Chevin for their permission or help, which really saved CPS time and money." He added, "I had a limited computer background initially, yet I could make pretty significant changes to the application myself."

The advanced software system manages complex streams of unlimited fleet-related data throughout the entire value chain and across the CPS organization, streamlining paper-intensive processes and improving workflow. "We are now able to enter data once and then move the information electronically between multiple business systems," Witkowski said.

Tracking & Visibility Improved



FleetWave's software applications provided two important improvements to CPS's data management and fleet administration. "First, we are able to track a multitude of assets from different systems," said Witkowski. In addition to company-owned units, CPS leases vehicles from multiple leasing companies. "We now have all leased and fixed assets centralized and tracked in one system. That allows us to easily see the big picture,"

he explained. "The second advantage for our organization was the visibility the system brought to fleet expense," said Witkowski.

The company's widespread retail locations and decentralized structure created differences in procurement and accounting for repair, maintenance, and fuel expense. "We never knew exactly how much money we were spending on rolling stock assets. There was a big gap between how much actually was spent and how much we knew was spent at the asset level," said Witkowski.

The FleetWave system now tracks all ownership and operating expenses, and automated EDI processes input electronic data from multiple sources, automatically updating the CPS fleet management database. Data errors have been reduced and administrative time has been saved, Witkowski noted. "Multiple data sources are seamlessly integrated into one system, greatly enriching report worth."

The company has implemented nearly the full range of FleetWave application modules. Systems users include CPS fleet administration, branch office management, and more than 3,000 assigned drivers. The FleetWave Driver Portal application tracks business and personal vehicle usage through a remote entry feature that allows drivers to input their personal data. In addition, fleet personnel data is now linked to the CPS corporate HR system. Other applications include document management and retention tools.

Purchasing Interface Real-Time

Control of fuel and maintenance spend has been improved recently through a real-time interface with CPS' purchasing system. Processes are integrated with the T-Check program. "T-Check Systems issues a fleet MasterCard assigned to individual vehicles," said Witkowski. Division management can access the fleet card transaction-limit data in real-time to monitor and track individual vehicle purchases or total fleet expense.

Visibility of the vehicle acquisition approval process has also been enhanced. FleetWave's project flow module provides visibility of approvals from the initial request through each approval step. "Everyone has visibility of the request as it progresses through the approval matrix, and users can quickly identify any bottlenecks," said Witkowski. He can set user access at various levels throughout operations. "If you are a location manager, you can see your location information only. If you're a division manager, you have access to the entire division data," he explained.

System Manages Vehicles & More

The data management system's tracking features can extend beyond vehicles, Witkowski noted. "FleetWave is really a total asset management system. We also monitor our copier equipment with FleetWave, tracking the leased machines, their locations and pay per copy meter reads, because we have to track tax at local and state levels," he said. The seamless, integrated, and flexible data management system "helps find the weak spots in a process by taking out the human factors," Witkowski concluded. **FF**