

Bradco Completes RFID Pilot for Tracking Its Drivers

The building and roofing distributor is now equipping each of its 900 trucks with a device that integrates RFID and GPS.

By Claire Swedberg

Jan. 2, 2007—Building and roofing distributor Bradco Supply has completed a 60-day pilot at several of its facilities, involving 100 mobile tracking units using RFID and GPS technology in its trucks. The distribution company is now installing a total of 900 units at all 150 of its locations. Bradco hopes to have all units installed by March 2007.

Telargo, a provider of management services for mobile assets, is providing the devices. Such units, installed in the vehicles, combine a handset that drivers can use to send and receive text messaging with a GPS receiver and an RFID interrogator. Data from the devices can be sent wirelessly through Telargo's Control Center to a Telargo-hosted Web site that Bradco utilizes to track its trucks and drivers in real time.

Bradco is using the system to locate trucks and drivers on their route, as well as for workforce management such as tracking driver hours and mileage, and for automated fuel tax reporting to government agencies. Utilizing sensors that monitor how well the truck engine is operating, the unit transmits on-board diagnostic codes (OBD) to indicate any problems. This helps the company carry out preventative maintenance. Telargo is supplying the enterprise integration.

Bradco pays a monthly fee per vehicle for the system, which will be installed at the company's facilities in 23 states, with six to eight vehicles per location. For several years, Bradco has been experimenting with automated tracking of its vehicles and drivers. In 2004, the company began using a GPS-only system that tracked drivers' movements as they traveled their 100- to 150-mile-radius daily routes.

"We were looking for increased productivity and wanted to minimize the time we spent on the phone," says Kevin Tremmel, corporate fleet manager. The most common call the company receives, he says, is from customers asking, "Where's my delivery?"

Without an automated tracking system, Tremmel explains, employees spent a large percentage of time trying to locate trucks and drivers whenever customers called inquiring about drivers' locations and estimated arrival times. However, Tremmel says, the GPS system did not give the company the information it required. For one thing, that system offered tracking only, but no additional services such as linking a driver to a specific truck, or expandability to include other features in the future.

The new Telargo system offers Bradco the ability to use GPS in conjunction with RFID technology.. Drivers use RFID to identify themselves as the driver of a specific truck and record such data as the time they left a facility. From there, a GPS system helps the office locate the truck's position. The RFID and GPS data is sent over a mobile telecommunications network using GPRS protocol to Telargo's data center, where it is posted

on a Web site in real time, says Telargo CEO Bogdan Pavlic.

Bradco Supply selected Telargo's solution, says Tremmel, because it was customized to the transport company's requirements. "All the things we needed are not cookie-cutter. Telargo customizes it and makes it user-friendly." Currently, he adds, the system is fully functional at four or five of the company's facilities. Each vehicle tracking unit has an RFID interrogator able to read the 125 kHz passive NXP Semiconductor RFID tag embedded in the driver's ID cards.

RELATED_ARTICLES The RFID system provides two functions: It links a driver to a specific vehicle, and it also records the time a driver enters a vehicle, keeping track of the time that driver is on the road. According to Pavlic, this data can then be made available to the DOT to guarantee drivers are not working more hours than regulations allow—known as Hours of Service.

"We don't know what our ROI (return on investment) will be yet, but I think it will be dramatic," Tremmel says, due to improved efficiency with office personnel spending less time trying to locate missing vehicles, and drivers paying closer attention to their route because they know they are being tracked. In addition, Tremmel says, Telargo will include turn-by-turn driving instructions for each trip via GPS, sometime in 2007.

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