

INTERVIEW: ROMEX WORLD LTD



OVERCOMING THE MOBILE PHONE MENACE WITH AN APP

Romex Driver Protection is an app-based solution that allows hauliers to easily prevent their drivers using phones out on the roads. **Tony Hall** talks to **Steve Arscott**, Sales Director, Romex World

In July, Kent Police patrolled the M20 in an unmarked 40-tonne truck: in five days they caught 37 drivers using mobile devices and, in one case, spotted a driver in a truck watching a film on a laptop.

In the same month, research for the RAC's 'Be Phone Smart' campaign found that only 60% of those asked would stop using a mobile while driving if it was the cause of an accident.

The RAC responded to that saying, "it was surprised the figure is not significantly higher given that the con-

sequences can be so severe in terms of the impact on human life?"

The evidence is overwhelming. Despite the multi-vehicle pile-ups, the deaths, the criminal convictions, legal penalties and the efforts of companies to enforce restrictions on their employees, the use of mobile devices by drivers carries on as if the distraction just doesn't matter. It's a bad habit, it's dangerous and it's illegal, but it's a habit proving very difficult to kick.

Romex World has introduced an app-based solution to the problem that sales

director Steve Arscott explains came from the need to make its own products safe to use by drivers on the road.

Romex has a whole suite of software products billed as an 'end-to-end mobile workforce management system', he explains, part of which is job scheduling.

Having created the job system, Arscott explains that Romex realised, "Companies were going to be sending drivers jobs through our system, and potentially drivers could open up job when they are driving. Then, of

course, if a driver had an accident and was looking the phone it would be our software that's caused it. So we thought we'd better make it safe."

Stopping messages on the move

Romex came up with new software that stopped messages coming through when drivers were on the road. It proved an immediate success with customers.

"What we found, very quickly afterwards, was that we were getting asked: 'Can we have that on its own?'"

Customers knew they had problems with mobile phone use, Arscott explains. They understood that communication is vital to a mobile workforce, and had policies set up to manage it, but no means of knowing whether their policies were being adhered to or not. "There wasn't an answer available," Arscott continues. "We stumbled on it quite by accident, and suddenly realised we have a product."

Introduced two years ago, and now marketed as Romex Driver Protection, "There was nothing, and there still is nothing, like it available on the market," Arscott tells me. "It has become Romex's best-selling stand-alone product."

The way the app has been designed means that it can be tweaked to mirror each company's rules and requirements.

"We come across a lot of policies as we go from company to company," Arscott continues. "For example, some people allow Bluetooth use of phones, but we're increasingly seeing now that companies are outlawing Bluetooth as well. So we can block hands-free or we can keep hands-free open."

The same goes for SMS, email, and social media notifications, Arscott says. "They are all suppressed, so you won't even get a notification that you've got a message, it will just suppress it until you've stopped, then the messages will come through.

"There's also a delay built in, so that when you stop you're not going to get all your messages coming through immediately, you're going to get a delay. Standard is 60 seconds, but that can be customised to suit."

It doesn't matter what a company's policy is, he says. "What's permanent is that hand-held use of phone is com-



pletely blocked, so you cannot dial out hand-held and cannot receive a call if you're not connected to a Bluetooth device. It will divert straight to voice-mail."

Simple and fully automatic

It isn't just adaptability that is the selling point, says Arscott, but the fact that it's an app and there's no black box. "You just download it. It uses the GPS and accelerometer on the smartphone to check movement and speed, and when it detects 4 mph or more it says 'right, I'm driving now' and safe mode automatically kicks in."

It's all fully automated, he adds, "so the driver doesn't have to do anything. The driver doesn't have to tell the phone 'I'm starting a journey now' because it's all detected automatically."

For a company buying the app, explains Arscott, the service support is there straightaway. "We will set up a site for them. There's a web portal that gives them reports, so they can validate that their policy is being adhered to, and it can alert them to anybody that's messing around.

So if anyone, for example, tries to uninstall the app, it pings a message back to their line manager saying that they've uninstalled it. Similarly, if some-

Stats from Romex show how much mobile phone use affects drivers

body turns their GPS off to try and fool the phone that they're not driving, a message goes straight back to the office to say that's what they've done. So they're not going to do it more than once."

Once the web portal has been set up, says Arscott, it's simply a matter of putting their drivers' phone numbers into the system, "so when they download the app it licenses it against what we've already put in, then they're good to go. It's very simple, they can be up and running in 24 hours."

If a driver leaves a company, or the company has a lot of driver turnover, using agency drivers perhaps, then the app can be moved from phone to phone. "Basically they've got a number of licenses. They purchase 100 licenses perhaps; it doesn't matter who uses it, anyone in the company. They can just delete one driver, add a new driver. We train them how to do it." There's no cost to make a switch he adds. "They can do it themselves."

What Romex is trying to do is to remove the biggest cause of accidents on UK roads. Arscott goes on: "I sit in meetings up in Westminster and they are talking about policing and how they are going to solve the problem. Well the problem's simple, you just stop it at source."

Giving hauliers peace of mind

Removing the problem will have consequences beyond road safety, Arscott points out.

"It removes the cost of policing, it removes the cost of training. I think it also gives companies peace of mind more than anything else."

It's one less thing they don't have to worry about, he says.

"They get a phone call: one of their driver's has been in an accident, police have investigated. A mobile phone was in use; they've now got to go to court.

"I talk to many company health and safety directors and they all have the same worry. None of them knows what to do about it.

"This removes that fear." ■

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