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Challenges of adoption

More than 10 years on from 'revolutionary' introductions in the field of telematics, C&A examines potential reasons why this technology still has not yet reached the lofty heights predicted.

Back in 2011, following the introduction of a whole host of systems from major manufacturers and third party providers, we commented that telematics had 'finally come of age' and that 'its use was gathering pace both in the crane and powered access markets'. We also predicted that within a year or two telemetry would become standard on larger products such as truck mounted lifts and cranes and that it was conceivable to see a day in the 'not to distant future' when every item of rental equipment had telemetry installed...

A false dawn?

OK, so we may have been guilty of being a tad over optimistic, but these comments were made three years into what we deemed 'revolutionary' introductions to telematics. Systems allowed rental companies and manufacturers to remotely assist and resolve common user errors such as whether a machine's emergency stop was depressed, its outriggers incorrectly set up or its battery/fuel levels were low etc... This coupled with various geofencing and GPS vehicle tracking systems - technology which had been around

for more than 10 years prior to our comments - was available as well as a range of maintenance and inspection systems which provided companies and end users alike with a whole host of benefits.

So given all this, and the speed and ease in which technology has been adopted in day to day life, we felt (and still feel) that our predictions in 2011 should not only have come to fruition before now, but long since surpassed.

Fast forward to 2020

Fast forward 10 years and the predominant use of telematics is still very much geared towards asset location and usage. Improvements have clearly been made across the board but generally speaking they are very similar to what was going on 10 years ago and certainly the adoption and usage is nowhere near as revolutionary as we expected.

The major difference from then and now is that almost all manufacturers have some sort of telematics offering - whether that be developed inhouse or from a third party and available as standard or as a bolt-on. Another important difference is that accessing and analysing the data has become much more user friendly, with information offered in digestible formats on an array of dashboards, portals and mobile devices.

Even with these developments however it seems, as an industry, we have yet to fully grasp the full potential telematics has to offer. Perhaps we underestimated the industry's historical reluctance to adopt new technology... but surely there is more to it than that?



It's clear from Trackunit that interfaces have come a long way since 2011.



JLG offers both its remote analyser reader and access control to enhance safety

Alternative to manufacturers?

A lot of manufacturers are now offering the ability to integrate the data from other manufacturers into a single platform. But if you have not already committed to one manufacturer then a potential alternative is through rental software providers.

inspHire sales director Martin Bestwick, said: "The solution stack that inspHire offers incorporates many applications that are utilised across our customer base. These applications range from mobile solutions, integrated web portals, sales and analytic tools and of course telematic data feeding directly into the inspHire system from many telematic vendors."

inspHire, for example, is able to consolidate a large range of telematic data collected from more than 18 different providers including ZTR, CanTrack and Trackunit. This ensures customers have all the information they need in one simple system without having to move between a multitude of product specific interfaces (eliminating one of the challenges discussed in this feature). The customer web portal he mentions is a platform for rental companies to push end users key telematics information relating to the products they have on hire.

inspHire's Web Portal shows machine location along with a various other information.



Ruthmann launched its 'state of the art' Connect telematics package in 2011



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Retrofitting

In order to incorporate the entire fleet the option to retrofit devices to older machines becomes important, Matt Ross from BlueSky explains: "As a company we have undergone a huge programme to get telemetry retrofitted, we want more than just the basic information provided on some of the older machines, which can be challenging."

While the costs of developing the systems or adding them to an existing fleet retrospectively involves a massive investment, the benefits for manufacturers, their distributors, rental companies and end users can be huge. Early this year Niftylift launched its Niftylink telematics which can be retrofitted to its machines to provide information on user issues and identifies key warning signs of potential machine breakdowns. Following a breakdown it will also provide details on what the issue is, what caused it and how to resolve it.

Genie also offer retrofitting kits that allow you to add Genie Lift Connect to all machines manufactured since 2015 as they were equipped with its telematics-ready connector.

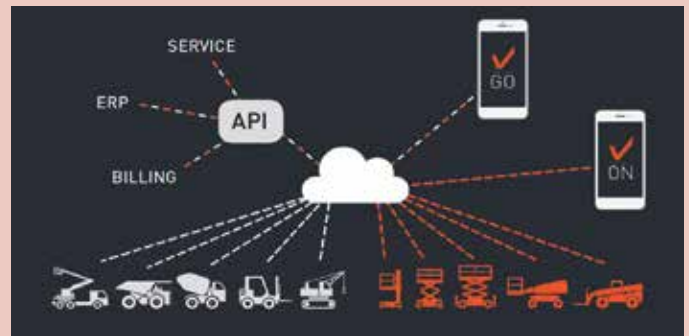


Niftylift recently launched its 'Niftylink' which can also be retrofitted

Manufacturer aggregation

A potential solution - although by no means the cheapest option - for rental companies with a range of different machines and manufacturers, and who are not already using existing rental software, is to approach a single manufacturer to integrate the data using an Application Programming Interface (API). Simply put this allows a telematics device installed on a machine by one manufacturer to talk to one from another manufacturer.

Speaking on the topic Matt Ross said: "A lot of the manufacturers are now offering aggregation opportunities, so will host all of your data from all of your suppliers in one platform. While this is great for smaller companies, especially those who might hire out a wider range of equipment from tools to telehandlers etc... for us it would tie us into one particular manufacturer, and larger rental groups like ours, would want to be fully in control of their own data as well as add additional data from other non-telemetry systems, ERP's for example."



Skyjack's Elevate system connects rental fleets directly to third party rental software.

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BlueSky thinking

When it comes to routine data it is probably fair to say that the access industry is probably leading the way compared to crane hirers, at least in terms of understanding and implementing telematics. Although at some levels - the crane manufacturers and rental companies operate some highly sophisticated telematics operations - but that is another story.

Matt Ross, product and telemetry manager of Loxam's BlueSky Solutions research and development division, spoke at length with us on the company's approach to telematics and how it has managed to incorporate it within the business. "The new standard for the Loxam Powered Access Division is to have a fully digitalised fleet and for all new machines to have a minimum specification for telemetry," says Ross. "The more machines we can have fitted with telemetry, the more information we can report, whether that be trending information for our customer base, or just specific machine based knowledge on a particular site."

"Although it might not seem like it,



Matt Ross has more than eight years' experience at BlueSky Solution.

telemetry as a whole in our industry has increased exponentially. More and more our customers are requesting information direct to them and that information is not necessarily just on breakdowns or machine usage, but also on management information for operatives all the way through to total relationship efficiencies."

"With telematics we are proactively advising our customers about the machines they have used previously. There might be examples where customers were unaware that they had underutilised machines, or ones that are taking excessive usage. We are able to notify them of these areas and offer alternatives to make them more efficient as well as provide cost saving benefits."

Challenges

"It is all about what you can read, telemetry is only as good as the data it can pick up, so the sensors need to be on the machine in the first place, or added additionally at extra costs. Machinery is an expensive cost - and as manufacturers try to reduce the overall cost of the machine - as they should - this can mean we lose value. For example, as engines are made smaller to comply with new legislation standards they require fewer sensors to control them, we lose the ability to see exactly what that engine is doing when you get below certain tier levels. Therefore we cannot report on it. It is somewhat counter intuitive for telematics when our machines become more efficient. We want sensors on them and lots of things to be able to read."

The great data debate

The question "who owns the data" was met with a mixed reaction all round. Everyone has a feeling that they should have a right to it. Whether it is the manufacturer supplying the original machine, the rental company that purchases the machine or the end user who actually generates the data - where should it sit?

Ross had a nice approach: "As an industry do we want to be really open and honest about it and get a culture of using the data to help our supply chain and customers or do we want to silo it and use the data for ourselves and try and benefit from it? Nationwide Platforms would like to see it more open - but with GDPR is this possible?"

inspHire's Bestwick Martin adds "On an OEM level its difficult to imagine an agreement being reached to force standardisation of data or share data at this moment in time due to the sheer number of hurdles that would need to be overcome to be able to gain a general consensus. Issues such as confidentiality, GDPR, anonymity, consistency in the collection of data are all very complex subjects so whilst I am sure the technology is available to support it, I don't yet see enough open dialogue on these issues which will make it possible and whilst there is the AEMP standards adherence to them are sketchy at best."

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Could access codes soon be replaced with smart card readers throughout the industry?

Back to the crystal ball

Where companies have adopted telematics it seems usage varies depending on the size of or focus of the company. Major companies for example are looking to use telematics as a 'value added' benefit for its large customers, helping highlight inefficiencies and unsafe operators, whilst the smaller companies are looking to utilise the technology with more insight into charging and servicing schedules to offset the initial



Check back next year to see how we get on with our predictions!

costs of implementing it.

It is probably fair to say 2020 has dealt us a duff hand with Covid-19, but if it has taught us anything, it is the importance of having a good digital infrastructure. In our Working from Home feature in the last issue of Cranes & Access, we highlighted just how quickly new technology can be adopted to enable businesses to carry on running. Something which would not have been possible for previous generations - or even five years ago! In comparison, telematics seems to be moving at a snail's pace with usage still focused on asset location and usage.

Gradual improvement are clearly underway however as more and more companies appreciate the

enormous benefits that can be gained, and this is one that can be a win-win for all of those involved. The manufacturer obtains invaluable feedback that can help with product development, the rental company can use it for make huge efficiency gains and buy machines more wisely, and the end user benefits from controlling and monitoring machine usage on site, while knowing exactly where new machine deliveries are, what any issues are and then they might be sorted.

That being said, we will temper our expectations this time round by remaining cautiously optimistic that telematics is set to take hold - and that when it does it will be a game changer.

To the Brave

On behalf of Cranes & Access and the Vertikal team, we would like to join others in paying tribute to those people around the world that have continued to work in critical and essential jobs, often at serious risk to themselves, in order that the rest of us could avoid or limit the risk of contracting the Covid-19 virus. They are truly the brave ones.

They include but are by no means limited to:

- Health & care workers
- Emergency services
- Supermarket/food shop and pharmacy employees & suppliers
- Transport drivers - especially bus drivers
- Postal workers
- Delivery drivers of critical equipment as well as food & essentials
- Utility workers
- Construction staff/operators working on essential facilities
- Service engineers working on critical equipment

Hopefully more of us will appreciate the work you do throughout the year and not just in a crisis. We are certain that all of our readers will join us in saying a very big

Thank You!

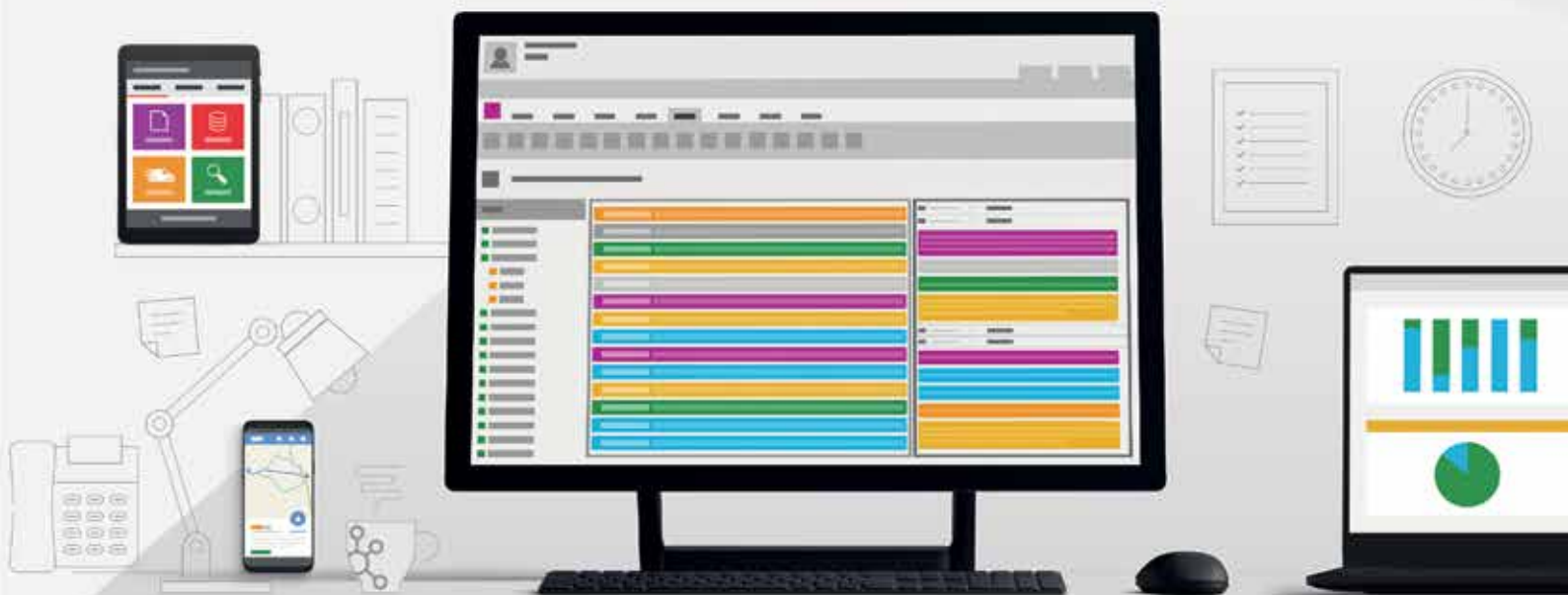


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