



Boost profits by moving more cars, faster

Franchised dealers are increasingly looking to the used car market to boost their profitability, which means carrying more stock and, therefore, moving more stock. For most dealers, that means using a logistics company.

"Used car departments often choose us due to our understanding of how speed of movement relates to the preparation cycle and also how it impacts on a dealer's profitability," said PRO-Driver commercial director Neil Lakin.

Speed is of the essence, believes Lakin, because not only does it enhance the service the dealer can offer an interested customer – for example, by offering a next-day delivery guarantee if a request is made prior to 2pm – but also speeds up a dealer's stock turn, boosting their return on investment.

He said: "There is still a huge untapped logistics enhancement for sold/deposited used vehicles to be moved to the selling dealer within 14 working hours."

PRO-Driver, which has delivered more than 400,000 vehicles in the past 15 years, grew out of a favour to a friend to deliver one car.

In 2002, racing and rally car instructor Joss Ronchetti got an urgent call from Philip Hall, then a sales manager at Guy Salmon

Jaguar in Coventry. A customer in North London was awaiting delivery of a new XKR and the driver assigned to the task had been injured and taken to hospital.

From that came other word-of-mouth recommendations and before long Ronchetti gave up his instructor job and enlisted his brother to help with the increasing workload.

Today, PRO-Driver moves about 1,000 cars a week, ranging from dealer-to-dealer used cars to corporate sales and group buyer collections. The company's biggest client over the past 12 months has been TrustFord, with just under 4,000 deliveries.

Other dealer clients include Sytner Group, which has used PRO-Driver for corporate sales for 10 years.

PRO-Driver uses 24 transporters, 34 flat-bed trailers and two covered boxes to move cars, complemented by a nationwide network of trade-plated drivers that has increased from 90 to 100 over the past 12 months. Each driver is self-employed and stringently assessed.

Former police driving instructor John Hunting puts applicants through their paces, not just on their driving ability, but also on their 'handover' skills.

"Some applicants think it's just a driving job from A to B. Out of every 10 we assess, only



two or three are successful," said Lakin.

With drivers – uniformed and wearing identity lanyards – collectively travelling almost 4 million miles a year, Lakin described the logistics as "a spider's web that's always being rewoven".

At the heart of that web is a purpose-built software package, introduced in 2013, that covers all needs from bookings to vehicle movements, to accounting and clients signing off on drivers' PDAs for collections and deliveries.

"This technology means that within one hour of a vehicle being delivered (subject to network coverage) the vehicle condition report and other information will arrive by email at all parties concerned," said Lakin.

That 'other information' includes "total transparency" of fuel usage. "On every vehicle movement we take an image of the start mileage and start fuel gauge at the collection point," Lakin explains. "The finish mileage and fuel gauge are also photographed at the delivery point. These images, along with receipts for fuel that may have to be bought en route, are emailed to the booking dealer as soon as the vehicle has been accepted at the delivery point."

Bookings are handled by a 14-strong admin team at PRO-Driver's Leicester headquarters. Each driver's schedule is displayed on screens that change colour – green when the driver is in possession and red when the vehicle has been signed for at delivery.

The jobs also have colour-coded lines to indicate the method of delivery – aboard a transporter, for instance – the category of customer and the level of service (standard, silver or gold).

Finally, there is a 65-inch touchscreen showing the current location of drivers (by tracker), the collection and delivery points and nearest available driver to any location.

"Typically, through his PDA, a driver will have a day's notice of his next job," said Lakin. "It could be anywhere from Bolton to Southampton, with a collection from Southampton to Milton Keynes. Crucially, because it operates postcode to postcode, the client is not paying for the return journey."

Five years ago, most of PRO-Driver's work was shifting used cars, and this still accounts for about 15,000 movements, a significant number of which fall within the company's 'appraise and buy' service.

"This can be either a dealer or a private

individual seeking the assurance that what they're buying fits in with the information they've been given," said Lakin. "So our driver will carry out an inspection for any damage and a road test."

However, this is now exceeded by corporate movements, totalling more than 22,000 a year.

As well as savings on employed drivers and transporter costs, PRO-Driver points to the advantage of dealers not having to worry about uninsured losses.

"It doesn't take too much accident damage, especially with the higher-end models, to end up paying more than the £5,000 excess and the average cost to a dealer is around £80k a year, depending on the amount of their excess," explains Lakin.

He cited one dealer, now a PRO-Driver

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NEIL LAKIN, PRO-DRIVER

customer, who faced a bill for £15,000 in uninsured loss after three cars were damaged while being moved in a confined compound.

"Our insurer recently examined our mileage, number of drivers, the variety of locations, put every other factor into the equation and said our excess should be triple the amount we pay!"

Latest developments include a further five vehicles for the truck fleet, an online booking portal and an electronic 'gateway' for data transfer. The gateway allows dealers to have pre-loaded forms that need to be signed by the customer – these may be for simple customer acceptance, proof of delivery, leasing documents or CSI score forms. These documents also arrive instantly back to the booking dealer's email inbox.

The gateway, with benefits that include speedier payments, is designed to complement the MoDel lease document service for which the company has 124 driver handsets.

As for the cost to the dealer, Ronchetti's original costing principle is still essentially the same: A price per mile, plus fuel and expenses, 10% cheaper than someone using their own driver.

"People can leave us, tempted by a cheaper deal elsewhere – but invariably they return, saying there is nothing to beat us in terms of flexibility, performance and technology," said Lakin.



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