The future of Electronic Proof of Delivery (EPOD)

The logistics industry is one of the fastest moving in the UK. It's also one of the most influenced by new technology – both directly and indirectly – meaning that there are more options and increased flexibility for logistics businesses and consumers alike.

When it comes to delivery, next-day time slots, email updates, text notifications and electronic signatures are all expectations rather than idealistic requests in today's environment. But it is all underpinned by the technology working in the background to ensure a smooth and efficient service with accurate updates and tracking.

But what's next? Well, to understand how the industry is going to evolve, it's important to look at the current conditions and recognise where the opportunities – and the challenges – will be coming from in both the medium and long-term.

The current climate

Advances in how we buy, receive and return goods have had far-reaching effects. Consumers now expect a very high standard of service, which has largely been driven by the retail market.

Logistics is under more intense customer pressure than ever before and the standard is being set by one-day and even same-day deliveries, such as Amazon Prime Now. EPOD systems have to be able to guarantee that they can match this service, and the best systems will offer vehicle and resource management, real-time tracking, instant invoicing, reduced paperwork and easy integration with other platforms.

Whether business or residential, customers want real-time information at their fingertips. This means accurate ETAs, geo-fencing and integrated IT systems from intake to invoice.

But many SMEs today run several different systems between transport, warehousing and back office functions. Data can be often be imported or exported, but there is little true integration. This means that it is very hard for many companies to have accurate data, and this in turn often limits companies' ability to save money.

It's expected that cloud computing will speed up the industry's change to fully integrated systems. This will seamlessly connect mobile workforces with offices and management, offering huge benefits like instant scalability, a freeing of in-house IT resource and low upfront investment.

What's around the corner?

Many of the changes that will have an impact over the next 3-5 years are already underway, but it may take time for some solutions to find their place in an already tech-heavy marketplace.

One critical area that many businesses have identified is the so-called 'last mile', where drivers can offer a personal touch to help raise customer satisfaction at the point of delivery. At a time when items can be bought and delivered with minimal human interaction, it's important to retain a customer service element and this where drivers – especially those at SMEs - can shine. Of course, they still need to be supported by accurate information in order to fulfil these duties, which the latest mobile devices and EPOD solutions can provide.

Meanwhile it's expected that more manufacturing work will return to Europe and the UK as costs rise in countries like China. However, this will alleviate environmental pressure to shorten supply chains and create more local jobs.

The environment is a key issue that must be considered going forward. In 2015, UK's e-logistics sector dispatched over 1 billion parcels nationwide, according to Apex Insights' Global Parcel Delivery Market Insight Report.

By 2040, the equivalent of more than 100 million working days could be lost to traffic congestion unless new technologies emerge to improve logistics efficiency.

One way to alleviate this issue is to make better use of space. Due to a lack of visibility in the job scheduling process, vehicles are often loaded improperly, wasting available space. EPOD can help provide better visibility of orders and delivery dates, helping decrease the number of vehicles on the road and thereby also reducing fuel and maintenance costs.

Future gazing

Although many of the long-term changes we could see develop in logistic will be driven by what happens in the next few years, there are a few issues that businesses need to prepare for.

Supply chains will see substantial re-engineering both at an operational and infrastructural level in order to meet cost and environmental targets.

It's also expected that internationally recognised consignments codes will be created to allow a single RFID or barcode to speak for a product at every border, port or terminal, but transport systems will have to integrate horizontally and vertically.

The industry will also start to operate with increased interactivity between suppliers, transport providers and retailers. This is one reason why any EPOD systems must have easy system integration options so that they can effectively deal with data at any level.

No matter what the future brings, EPOD will provide a number of benefits both internally and externally.

Businesses gain an increased level of visibility to help with job scheduling and vehicle tracking, which in turn helps increase efficiency and accuracy. Customers gain an advantage by being able to track their own delivery and gain an electronic proof of delivery – providing reassurance and confidence particularly to those buying high-value goods.

In today's competitive marketplace, and looking at the challenges and opportunities that may arise in the future, businesses equipped with EPOD will be well placed to cope with whatever is thrown at them.

For more information on EPOD, [visit TouchStar's website now](#).