Electronic Proof of Delivery (EPOD): Buyers Guide

What is EPOD and why do I need it?

It's likely you already know about EPOD, even if the term is not familiar. It stands for Electronic Proof of Delivery and at its core it involves a delivery driver using a mobile device to obtain digital proof from a customer to show that goods or services have been delivered.

Before EPOD solutions, drivers would usually pick up goods and a task list in the morning and work through their deliveries while taking signatures from customers on paper. They would then head back to the office to hand in the completed list with signatures.

Of course, that's a simplified version of events. But going digital improves not just that process but many other aspects of the delivery process. From enhanced evidence of delivery including photographs or barcode scans taken from a mobile device, to paperless real-time data exchanges with back-office systems, EPOD enables a much slicker delivery process for everyone involved.

It's all in the name of improving efficiency and accuracy, and a well implemented solution can help maximise cash flow too. But what do you need to look out for before investing in an EPOD solution?

To get to the root of the decision-making process it's often best to start with what your customers expect from the delivery experience, and then match that experience or even surpass it.

What customers expect

Customer experience and 'last mile' logistics have become crucial to developing a modern delivery process. We all have much greater expectations thanks to new uses of technology and on-demand services like those delivered by forward-thinking businesses, from Amazon to Uber.

Fulfilling new expectations is no easy task, but technology is helping to bridge the gap. Keeping customers happy means having the right technology in place to deliver the service they expect to overcome challenges that traditional solutions could simply not deal with.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is that customers now expect complete visibility of a transaction from the second they place an order until it is received. And that can apply to any order, from a cheap pizza delivery to a top of the range TV or any number of large-scale orders that a business may make.

Ensuring a great delivery experience is one of the first steps a business can take to scale their operation and, in turn, increase profitability.

What drivers will need

To enhance the customer experience, drivers will need to be provided with their own real-time alerts as well as continuous access to order details, directions and optimised route plans.

They will also need to have easy contact with customers and dispatch, and of course have the technology with them to secure proof of delivery and communicate with back-office systems on-the-go.

Going the extra mile, they may also be able to deal with returns on the doorstep or reroute to other locations in case delivery at the agreed time is not possible.

What managers need to know

Back at base, business leaders will want to make sure the delivery process is scalable and can be applied rapidly to new markets. They want to ensure the delivery service provides a competitive advantage and help to differentiate the business as an innovator.

They will want access to analytics in order to continue refining the process and – perhaps above all else – they want to get their investment right first time.

Measurable ROI, customisation, improved visibility, branding options, flexibility, staff satisfaction and in-app messaging are all likely to be required at some point and deserve consideration.

So, as you can see, delivering the experience your customers, drivers and business leaders expect is a challenge with many moving parts. The good news is that the technology involved with EPOD can meet these challenges and more.

How to get EPOD right

Many established businesses make the mistake of thinking new customer expectations only apply to small or startup companies. But the ability to place orders and track them to doorsteps in real-time is so widespread now that even big businesses could start to lose customers if they fail to provide the level of service expected.

A good delivery service strengthens customer satisfaction and loyalty, and with competition so high these factors should not be ignored.

Technology is helping businesses to operate at high levels of efficiency and facilitate a contestant link from purchase to delivery, customer to driver, operations to driver and brand to consumer. Companies that cannot match this process risk falling behind competitors and losing profits

to inefficient operations as mobile on-demand services spending rises.

We've identified what the problems are and how technology can help, but let's look at some specific demands and how features in an EPOD solution can help businesses not only meet but exceed customer expectation.

Delivery demands

You may already understand what customers want from a delivery process, because it's exactly what you would expect for your own deliveries. After all, the vast majority of people in the UK will at some point have made an order online and either been impressed, satisfied or disappointed by the service offered during delivery.

In any situation, we know that customers will want to track deliveries easily as soon as an order is placed. We know that they want to be able to access updates on any device and receive emails or text message notifications. We know that they want the ability to manage the delivery and make requests, such as changing the time or day of delivery to suit their schedule.

But managing this process on a large scale isn't easy. Especially when you consider the driver and business demands that must be met as well.
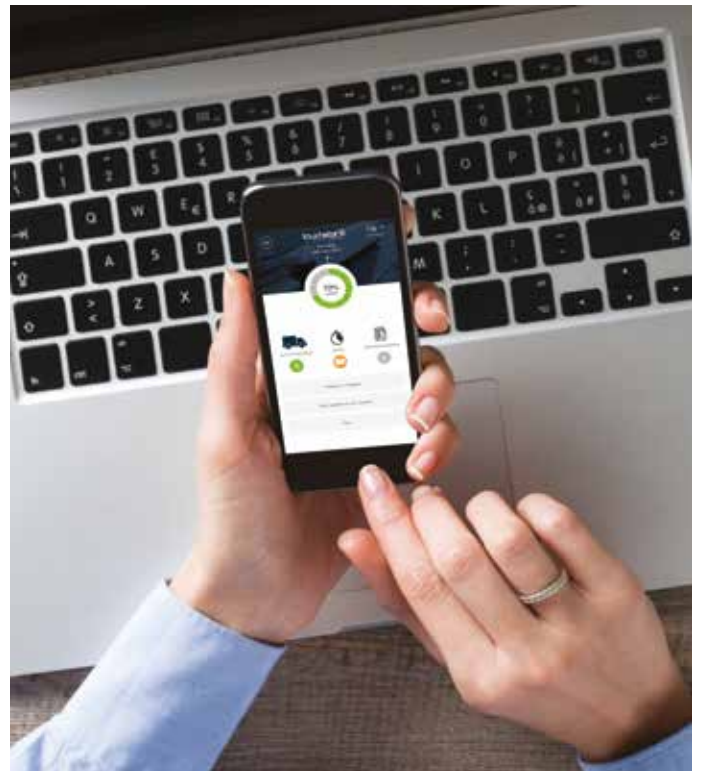
Solutions that meet expectations

The delivery process must be strong enough to handle peak periods of the year, flexible enough to meet customers' demands and smart enough to help optimise your business and provide measurable benefits.

Is a tough mix, but today's technology is up to the job. Here's some of the ways EPOD systems can help:

Job planning and scheduling

EPOD devices with highly flexible entry screens powered by a web-based back office system can cater for almost any delivery scenario. Once the jobs are entered on to the system, they can be automatically allocated to vehicles in the most logical order using a planning tool or simply allocated manually. Whichever method is chosen your planners are eliminating paperwork and saving time.

Route planning and optimisation

Using real-time job information, EPOD solutions offer the ability to drag and drop jobs on to the relevant vehicles and, using built-in checks, make sure you are not overloading the vehicle.

Once a manifest has been created or updated due to a customer request it can be sent out to the drivers in the field. To further enhance efficiency, the route can be viewed on a device by the driver that can automatically select optimised routes based on local traffic and delivery order.
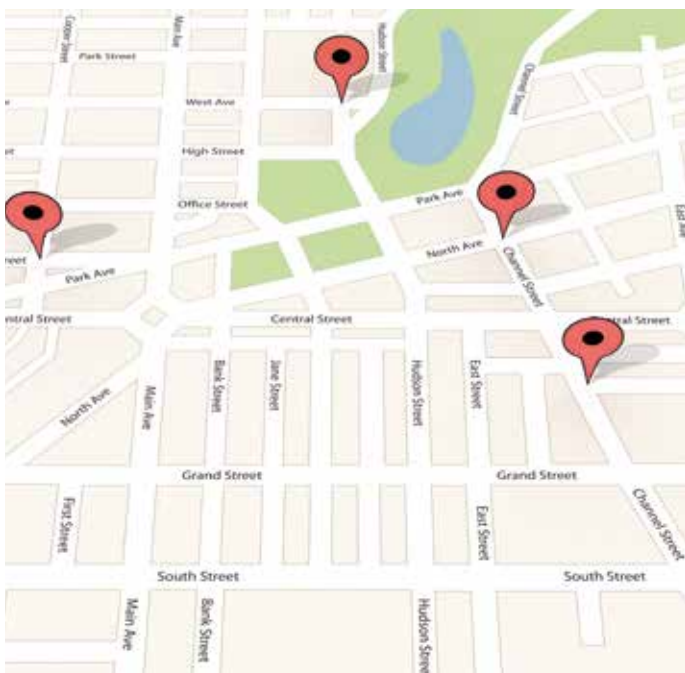
Vehicle and driver tracking

EPOD solutions allows fleet managers to track drivers and vehicles using their handheld device. Managers effectively see a real-time update of vehicle location on a digital map. As well as showing fleet information, managers can also access job information all within the same system – there is no need for separate tracking software.

In many scenarios this can take the pressure off drivers who may have met the agreed delivery time but are delayed as the client is unable to receive an item. With tracking in place, managers can adapt to these situations and update the driver on their next delivery while advising the customer on arranging a new delivery slot.

Safety and compliance

Safety is of major concern for the modern fleet operator and the EPOD systems can assist in two ways; through vehicle reminders (like tax, MOT and service dates) and vehicle inspection reminders to help drivers manually complete checks using their mobile device.

Driver inspections are especially important in maintaining vehicles so that there are no unforeseen issues during delivery, and a good EPOD solution will enable drivers to upload reports to managers in real-time, along with any photographs of issues such as low tyre tread.

This eliminates the need for additional paperwork and other interruptions that could affect how quickly the vehicle is maintained or repaired so that customers will not experience any delays.

Driver administration

EPOD solutions can help improve driver satisfaction by allowing drivers to complete a number of tasks through their mobile device, from timesheets and expense details to holiday requests.

The flow of real-time information from driver to back office make requests easier and faster to process and removes any instances of lost receipts or paperwork.

Reporting

A good EPOD solution will allow users to capture and review information for further analysis. Information can be displayed on any device ranging from tablets and mobile phones to a large TV in the traffic office.

An EPOD dashboard can display real-time ETA information for your jobs and notify you if a delivery is going to be late or on time. If required, there are a standard set of reports in

the system giving detailed information on jobs and driver performance.

A good system will also offer the ability to export all data fields, allowing you to create your own bespoke reports quickly and efficiently.

Integration

EPOD can be a standalone product, but it's often the integration into other IT systems that makes the biggest difference to improving visibility and the flow and data. A good technology partner will help you understand the level of integration that will benefit you most. EPOD solutions can be seamlessly linked to most leading ERP, business management and accounting packages.

Next steps

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

Delivery is a natural extension of customer service and should not be ignored as it's a perfect opportunity to get feedback or offer additional services. An EPOD solution can help to take advantage of the situation by making it easier for the business to track their deliveries, improving visibility for themselves and the recipient.

TouchStar's PODStar has been developed as a scalable electronic EPOD solution for any size of business from SMEs to major blue-chip organisations. Whether you have one vehicle or thousands, PODStar will ensure you optimise your work scheduling, reduce fuel costs and improve customer service levels without adding extra complexity.

Why choose TouchStar

TouchStar's PODStar solution offers tangible and immediate benefits to your operation, including

- Improved cash flow through faster invoicing
- Rapid ROI through improvements in workforce productivity
- Paperless and automated system reducing error rates

- Save time and money wasted in the search for lost POD paperwork
- Optimised delivery performance resulting in enhanced customer satisfaction
- Fuel reduction and improved carbon footprint through efficient routing
- Quickly view productivity by individual resource or vehicle, enabling you to determine sources of profit or loss
- Enhanced safety of drivers and the general public through automated vehicle reminders and checks.

TouchStar occupies a unique position as a supplier of EPOD and tracking solutions to the fleet sector, being a system integrator, hardware manufacturer and software development house. If you already have core system components in place, TouchStar can work with you to examine how to optimise or extend these, in order to accrue additional operational and business benefits.

If you'd like to find out more about PODstar, visit our website or contact the team today.