**Staying competitive with EPOD**

In recent years a mix of new technology and changes in consumer behaviour has created new challenges for the supply chain.

Meeting demand is not a simple task, especially at a time when most supply chain businesses’ primary concern is lowering their costs. But with reliability and quality now an expectation rather than a target, businesses need to meet these new challenges or risk falling behind.

But it’s not all bad news. While technology and new trends have increased customers’ expectations, they have also provided many more options to managers to improve their service.

Electronic point of delivery systems (EPOD) have developed rapidly, and now offer a number of features that can help users to remain competitive in challenging markets.

At a basic level this involves delivery drivers being given mobile devices to obtain electronic signatures from the client to confirm receipt of goods. This information is then delivered in real-time to back office systems so that invoices for completed jobs can be raised quickly, ensuring that speed, accuracy and convenience are all improved.

But it goes further than that, with options for job planning and scheduling, route planning, vehicle tracking, vehicle checks and reports all available to help improve your operation.

With that in mind, here’s two of the key challenges and trends that can be addressed with EPOD.

**On time, in full**

Although we are looking at new challenges, one of the key issues that is the biggest driver of customer dissatisfaction won’t come as a surprise.

In fact, delivering at the agreed time, without any products missing (on time, in full - OTIF) is becoming more of a problem as supply chains become increasingly complex.

A recent supply chain survey from Geodis found that ensuring OTIF deliveries is the top objective for supply chain companies, as it was in 2015.

But the reason for including OTIF as a *new* challenge is that the motives behind this choice have changed. It is now seen as a driver for moving away from cost-orientated objectives and towards value-orientated objectives that can meet customer expectations.

It’s no secret that supply chains are becoming increasingly complex as businesses scramble to meet customer demand. But an increase in complexity shouldn’t be seen as a barrier to optimising the supply chain. It simply means there is more opportunity to optimise processes and more data that can be collected and used to maximise efficiency.

The latest EPOD systems can help to accurately collect the data needed to spark these changes, ensuring accurate and timely deliveries and increasing customer satisfaction as well as the likelihood of repeat business.

**Visibility**

A crucial issue identified by the Geodis survey was end-to-end visibility, jumping from sixth in the objectives list to third.

Again, this shows how a value-orientated objective has overtaken strictly cost objectives, such as reducing transport and warehouse costs and optimising cash flows.

Almost 80% of respondents said they had no visibility or a restricted view, and only 6% said they had complete visibility of their supply chain.

To meet today’s demands, improved visibility is vital. It offers closer collaboration with partners, a reduction in disputes, risk anticipation, more flexibility and most of all increased customer satisfaction and higher profitability.

What’s more, today’s technology has come a long way in terms of giving greater visibility into the supply chain. From handheld devices to systems used on-board vehicles, as well as the management systems that pull all the pieces together, there are many ways to achieve the end result required.

Additionally, many applications are designed specifically to deliver real-time information into the hands of those who need it most.

Customers also 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.

**Moving forward**

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.

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**](http://www.podstar.co.uk/) or **contact** the team today.