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**TECHNOLOGY IS EVOLVING AT A FAST AND FURIOUS PACE,
INVADING EVERY FACET OF THE TRUCKING INDUSTRY.**



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HAVE TECH, WILL TRAVEL

LIKE IT OR HATE IT, TECHNOLOGY IS EVOLVING AT A FAST AND FURIOUS PACE AND INVADING EVERY FACET OF OUR LIVES. THE TRUCKING INDUSTRY IS NO EXCEPTION. HERE'S A PEEK AT WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT THE FUTURE TO LOOK LIKE.

By **Kenneth E. Seaton**



BY NOW
IT'S
FAIR-
LY COMMON
KNOWLEDGE
THAT THE CA-

NADIAN TRUCKING INDUSTRY - AS WELL AS MANY OTHER COUNTRIES - IS FACING A MAJOR CHALLENGE. INDUSTRY EXPERTS ARE PREDICTING THAT THERE WILL BE A PROJECTED DRIVER SHORTAGE OF AROUND 34,000 DRIVERS BY 2024.

As if those numbers aren't serious enough, a 2016 study¹ – prepared for the Canadian Trucking Alliance by CPCS Transcom – stated that figure “could increase to 48,000 based on plausible combinations of different trends that can affect industry demand, occupational attractiveness and labour productivity.”

Interestingly enough this report also stated that “based on forecasts by the Conference Board of Canada, for-hire trucking industry GDP is expected to grow from \$19.2 billion in 2014 to \$24.1 billion in 2024, for

a compound annual growth rate of 2.2%. Taking into consideration expected labour productivity growth, this industry growth implies the need for 25,000 additional truck drivers by 2024.”

And just because many sources are predicting that autonomous trucks will replace drivers, doesn't necessarily mean that it's something that the industry needs to be concerned about...yet! The reality is that fully-autonomous driving is at least a decade or two down the road; and there will be many speed bumps and regulations that will have to be dealt with before it ought to become a driver or industry concern.

So, on one hand we have a predicted driver shortage and on the other hand we have an expected annual growth rate! What to do, what to do? Pundits have differing opinions on how to best solve this dilemma. Some proposed potential solutions to dealing with the shortage include:

Conducting more aggressive driver recruitment campaigns via social media, advertising, word of mouth, etc.;

Ensuring that drivers are better trained by increasing paid training funding for new drivers and healthier reimbursement enticements for upgrading existing driver skill sets;

Making driving careers more at-

tractive to females, millennials, ex-military drivers and heavy equipment operators, etc.;

Identifying and addressing ways and means of improving the image of truck drivers and the trucking industry in general;

Using new technologies to re-brand trucking as a “wannabe” career.

While many of the suggested solutions are definitely do-able, in this article we're going to explore how technology – and its impact – will help the trucking industry in attracting the best and brightest of a new generation of driver. Technology will also go a long way towards addressing many of the issues that drivers are currently facing and should aid in ensuring longer driver retention.

Jean Marc Picard, executive director of the Atlantic Provinces Trucking Association (APTA) believes that “new technology will have a positive impact on our industry. A lot of the new technology that is used today is having great benefits for carriers.....from a safety and efficiency standpoint.”

There are a number of reasons for the looming shortage – far beyond a retiring workforce – but perhaps the secondary reason is that many believe that a truckers' lifestyle just isn't attractive enough to a younger generation. Combine that with safety and security concerns of its drivers, a 20-to-30 per cent driver turnover rate, no official government recognition as a

skilled trade, and a need to improve the overall image of the trucking industry and its drivers.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO DISPROVE THE MYTH THAT TRUCKING IS NOT A SKILLED POSITION

The outdated thinking that truckers are long on arms and short on brains is a sadly misguided perception. As anyone who has ever wheeled a big rig down a highway, navigated through city streets and/or backed into a tight loading dock will proudly tell you; being a trucker is a skilled profession and that not everyone is up to the challenge.

Monetary wise, truck driving may not be a bad career choice, with the CPCSS study noting that, “Truck driving, and particularly long-haul truck driving, is a reasonably well-paying occupation.” However, some drivers are sacrificing their health to bring home the bacon; as the study also determined that, “Long-haul truck drivers are required to work long hours, unpredictable hours and spend a lot of time away from home in order to earn their wages.”

As the trucking industry marches boldly forward so does the necessity of having a fully trained and competent driver sitting behind the wheel. Driver training and apprentice programs will have to be upgraded and updated to include new technology and how to best get the most bang for its buck.

Having truck driving designated as an official ‘skilled trade’ by the government would go a long way to boasting drivers' wages and benefits and would also be considered a positive move towards driver immigration purposes. Having an official designation, would make it more attractive and easier for employment consultants and international fleet owners to recruit and hire foreign drivers.

Even with a retiring and male-dominated workforce, the utilization of both existing and new technology will support – with the proper driver enticements--the trucking industry to optimistically retrain and upgrade the skill sets of many of its current drivers; thereby working towards addressing the industries high turnover rate.

TECHNOLOGY CAN BE USED TO ATTRACT A NEWER WORKFORCE

The trucking industry needs to tweak its image. This will go a long way to attracting a wider and more diverse range of vehicle operators. Targeting females, millennials, ex-military, some people with disabilities and new Canadian drivers would be a great place to start. Technology should be used, not only as an industry tool, but also as a ways and means of focusing attention on the trucking industry and its many career opportunities.

For people who not only use it, but also view it as an enabler to a better quality of life, technology and all that it en-





compasses is the way of the future. By concentrating its attention towards a more tech-savvy operator – like millennials – the industry will be targeting a potential workforce that's already driven to learn new technology and one that is eager to expand and apply its tech skills. The trucking industry will develop right along with them.

For truck driving industry old-timers, jargon such as; Evel Knievel – translates to Motorcycle cop, Chicken Coop – Weigh station/port of entry, Alligator – big piece of tread from a truck tire in the road, Driving Award – Speeding ticket, Backstroke – Return trip, Anchor Clanker – Boat trailer, is familiar and easily understood.

However, old-timers most likely wouldn't understand what social media, gigabytes, IT, cryptic, etc. mean. Conversely, it's probable that the new generation of truckers wouldn't have a clue as to what the old-timers were talking about either.

LOWERING THE STRESS OF ON THE ROAD TIME WITH TECHNOLOGY

There is no question that being a truck driver can be a very stressful occupation.

On a daily basis, drivers face the unrelenting pressure of needing to meet impossibly tight deadlines; having to comply with strict industry driver restrictions, dealing with demanding customers and battling through ever increasing traffic snags. For many fatigued drivers "the open road" has turned into more of a walled-in treadmill.

Nowadays savvy trucking industry leaders are turning to technology as they try to make being on the road less stressful and hopefully more attractive to newer drivers. They are providing their new drivers with tablets and other devices that will automatically update their log books and can also download electronic dispatches, enabling them too quickly and easily receive, track load assignments and other details.

The new tech will also permit drivers to hear voice-guided GPS-navigation that will direct them to follow customized and reliable truck-legal routes. It will also alert and direct them around unforeseen traffic glitches, and it will continually monitor and alert the driver, dispatcher and/or fleet mechanics of any problems or issues that the vehicle may be developing.

Divers who spend a long time on the

road away from family and friends often find it lonely and the downtime can be more than demanding. Technology is working hard to improve things. Apps – i.e. Around Me or Near Me – assist truckers in finding out information on businesses, restaurants, etc. close to their current location. Communicating via Skype or listening to soothing melodies, nature sounds or ocean waves can prove to be very calming.

Vehicles equipped to receive Wi-Fi will allow drivers to relax by reading or listening to a book or magazine on their mobile reader, watch TV or a movie, play video games, send and receive audio or text messages. Installing on-board fridges and microwaves will help promote healthier and more economical eating habits. These are just a few examples of how technology can put a little home in the cab.

TECHNOLOGY AND HOW IT CAN BOOST SAFETY, SECURITY AND WELLNESS

Both industry experts and fleet owners agree that by putting technology to effective use, they will be taking positive





steps to improving the way that the industry addresses the safety, security and wellness of its drivers. APTA's Jean Marc Picard agrees, saying that, "we do support new technology especially when it improves how we operate and makes us safer as an industry."

Fatigue management, long sedentary hours, sleep disruption and unhealthy eating habits, etc. are just a few of the ongoing industry and driver concerns. Installing and effectively monitoring on-board systems will allow for better tracking and will easily permit both drivers and dispatchers to make favourable changes to their schedules, loads and vehicles.

Up-to-the-minute vehicle tracking and the ability to instantly communicate with drivers will help dispatchers in making driver changes – while the vehicle is still on the road – in the event of family emergency or other necessity. This can be accomplished with the minimal amount of effort or downtime. Similarly, if there is an onboard incident or accident, technology has the capability to automatically alert emergency services and dispatchers.

Some prospective drivers may be intimidated by the size and sheer bulk of the industries vehicles and thereby may be put-off from choosing trucking as a career potential. Driver comfort and safety, both inside and outside the cab, is a real and viable industry concern. Vehicle manufacturers are now utilizing new technology in an effort to affectively address and

resolve many drivers' concerns.

Advances like stability control with automatic and antilock braking systems, blind spot warning devices, lane departure warning and collision avoidance systems make vehicles safer to drive. Cameras now aid drivers in not only backing up, but also allow them to scrutinize their vehicle's perimeter before leaving a vehicle, all in the service of providing better driver safety and security.

TECHNOLOGY THAT WILL HAVE DRIVERS OOHING AND AAHING

As if today's trucking tech isn't enough to satisfy, just around the next corner is the Internet of Things (IoT). Basically – IoT technology interconnects computing devices embedded in everyday objects or devices, thereby enabling them to send and receive data – very basically!

With the advancement of IoT, fleet owners and drivers will be testing and trying out platooning. This is when two or more trucks travel close together – usually around 15.2 meters apart – thereby reducing drag and saving fuel by drafting. The vehicles travel in an electronic cloud of sorts and are in constant communication with each other as they coordinate speed and braking.

Wearable devices that will greatly increase trucking safety by being able to continually monitor a driver's health, fatigue factor, etc. Hats, clothing, headsets and wrist-worn devices will keep an eye

on a driver's heart & breathing rate, body positioning including occurrences of microsleep or the dreaded "headbobs".

Drivers wearing smartwatch type technology that's equipped with built-in GPS navigation will receive an alert vibration or "tap" on the wrist in the event that a notification is needed. Also known as haptic feedback, this type of alert can be for exceeding the speed limit, warning of a vehicle in the driver's blind spots, etc.


In the near future, it is probable that drone equipped trucks will allow delivery companies and their drivers to go that last-kilometre for their customers. Drones could be hand or vehicle launched right from the top of the truck, deliver its package and then return to the truck at the same or a different location. Currently, companies like UPS, the Postal Service are testing out utilizing drones as part of their delivery fleets.


Today's truckers are a far cry from those who wheeled around the big rigs during Convoy movie days. And, they will be a far cry from what will be behind the steering wheels in the future. Vehicle manufactures, owners, fleet and transport managers and of course drivers, will have to learn to not only adjust to, but also evolve with the advancement of new technology. Technology may very well prove to be not only a game saver but also a game changer! 🚚

¹ The Truck Driver Supply and Demand Gap - Final Report, Prepared by: CPCS, 6-May-16

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