



Route Management Software For Those Who Want To Know

Is It Time To Upgrade?

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As a software developer it seems the most frequent questions I encounter revolve around the decision to upgrade current software. Many companies ask this question in search of answers. Upgrades are commonly frustrating to personnel during the first two months and change the way all processes have been done for the past many years.

Things to consider always come back to what you now have and what is available on the market. Every tool in your business has changed over the years; new coolers, new trucks, new softeners, new computers, new warehouse and plant equipment, and probably new personnel. It amazes me that new software is often neglected in the choices of where to upgrade. Although certainly not a complete list, below are a few questions to ask yourself:

- Does your data become corrupted?
- Do you sometimes seem to lose the history of invoices?
- Does your system crash or lock up on a regular basis?
- Are you constantly being charged more for less service?
- Do you wish certain reports were available?
- Are able to easily export your data?
- Can you find customer information easily?
- Is customer support for the system easy to obtain?
- Is it difficult to train new employees?
- Are you frustrated with a lack of information?
- Have you just learned to ignore too many things?

Consider how you are doing business and what your current software produces. All routing programs allow you to enter basic information – daily tickets, route sheets, cooler rentals, customer information, etc. The question to ask is if these daily entry tasks are producing the information you need to help manage your business. Let's face it, business has changed over the past decade and competition is stronger. It makes sense to have the information you need.

First and foremost is the use of handhelds. Handhelds eliminate many of the data entry and driver calculation errors, keep track of the invoices and time of delivery, and save hours of work for data entry. Whether you have three trucks or fifty trucks, data entry time for daily tickets takes only a few minutes. Drivers no longer have to calculate totals for the route. Totals are all calculated by the handheld so the truck inventory, sales and cash received just need to be balanced with inventory and money.

It has always been a discussion as to whether a Unix/DOS/Mainframe text based system was better than a Windows system. Entering hundreds or thousands of tickets every day into a text-based system is probably faster because there is no graphical overhead for the computer. However, the information hidden by any text-based system might make you think twice, and the use of handhelds eliminates entering all of those tickets.

Windows technology has caught up with the computing world and most Windows based programs are almost as fast as a text based system. The extra time (seconds) spent waiting for a window to open is more than offset by the information available in one place. If the customer needs a copy of the invoice, you can retrieve it from the computer desktop (with signature if handhelds are used) and fax it to the customer without leaving your desk. The graphical view makes training new employees much easier because all Windows programs use the same methods for most menus.

Twenty years ago, when computers first became affordable and useable in the office, it was said we would become a paperless society. In fact, those computers generated more paper than anyone could have imagined. Windows programs (along with the cheap disk space) are now coming much closer to the reality of a paperless office. We can now go back and print a report if needed, even if the month has been closed. We can get an accounts receivable list for the end of any month, and any detail report can be reprinted at any time if needed. Those reports can also be saved to disk, whereas a text based system only has the ability to print a report in whatever format the original creator made.

Many Windows programs give you the ability to customize your own reports so you can include only the information needed at the time. Sorting and filtering data is becoming the most frequently used tool for managing your business. Many times you may be looking for information on just one customer, route or driver for a particular range of dates. Instead of printing the entire report and throwing away ninety pages (or worse, storing it in the back room) it is easy in a Windows program to print just the part you need, whether it be choosing a range of pages to print from a preview, or filtering the data so the report only contains what you need.

Windows programs also make good use of laser and ink-jet printers instead of the text-based dot matrix printers of the past. Commonly, dot matrix printers are now used only in situations where carbon copies are needed, such as printing delivery tickets. The noise reduction of a laser or ink jet printer enables office personnel to think more clearly and eliminates that distraction when answering the phone.

Support for the older programs also is a factor in all of this. There are many thousands of programmers in the world who could help support your Windows program if the need arose. The text based programs are dependent on the people who wrote the program and those people are now nearing retirement age. When they retire, there will be no one around familiar with the language in which that program was written. As the customer base of those programs decline, the creator's costs rise since there are fewer to support the company. That means all existing customers must absorb that cost with an increase in annual support fees.

Worth thinking about? There are several Windows programs on the market created by people with many years of experience in the routing industry. Those years of experience are what make your job easier to produce and maintain the information needed to help your company grow. Of course, GBC Advanced Routing is the best in its class and allows you to see any report you can think of with the data you want to see. Custom reporting is only one of the things that set GBC apart from its competitors.

GBC Advanced Routing uses Microsoft SQL Server for data storage and .NET technology for the programming language, which means that there are hundreds of thousands of professionals in the United States and Canada that could support your program if the need arose. The older, proprietary data storage and programming languages (commonly called 4th Generation Languages) are losing programming professionals to the newer, more powerful languages so professional support dwindles over time.

Our pricing structure allows you to grow as your business expands with a one-time installation cost and an annual renewal fee that is more reasonable than any program on the market. GBC does not charge extra for the number of users, handheld programs, optimizing routes with MapPoint, or the Analysis Charts. Everything in our program is available to everyone. Fill out your wish list and call us to view a demonstration on line from the comfort of your own office. You will see how GBC can improve your operations and processes to enable you to do more, see more, and manage your business with fewer employees.