



What to expect when implementing an automated taxi dispatching system

The decision to implement an automated dispatching solution is a significant step for any taxi company. It represents not only a need to evolve operations, but a method of reducing costs, increasing revenue, improving fairness for drivers and ultimately, being able to provide the best service possible to your customers.

Automated dispatching solutions are composed of sophisticated technologies designed to improve your taxi operations. Whether your fleet consists of five vehicles or five thousand, implementing advanced technologies is complex.

The key to successfully integrating automated dispatching technologies is creating a well-defined multi-phased implementation process and a change management plan. The benefit of this approach is that it makes sure the project stays on track in terms of time and scope, ensures accountability from all parties involved, and secures buy-in from all levels of the organization. Exceptional project management and frequent communication between the technology provider and the taxi company are essential to a smooth implementation. "Choosing a vendor that can provide an experienced project team and concrete implementation plan will ensure a smooth, stress-free implementation," says Ron Boulton, IntelliFleet National Sales Manager for Trapeze.

A successful project implementation can be broken down into a series of phases:

- 1. Kickoff**
- 2. Specification review**
- 3. Software implementation**
- 4. Pilot**
- 5. Rollout**
- 6. Long-Term Support**

An automated dispatching solution combines mobile computers in the vehicle and dispatching software in the office. In-vehicle computers provide real-time vehicle tracking for faster dispatching, point-of-sale transactions, and in-vehicle navigation. In the office, the automated software works to free dispatcher time, improve communication and reporting accuracy, facilitate instant financial transactions, speed service and much more.

1. Project Kickoff

During this initial phase, the roles and responsibilities of each party are defined. The solution provider designates a Project Manager to guide the project from Kickoff through to client acceptance. The Project Manager meets with the client to outline the details of their existing system, learn why they want an automated dispatching solution, and help decide on the right technologies for their needs. A project schedule and implementation plan is developed to keep the client informed at every stage of the installation.

2. Specification Review Phase

The Project Manager and the client will formally go through the contract, and clarify the client's expectations of the new system. At the conclusion of the meeting, all parties will have a clear picture of what will be provided. As information is collected about the solution being implemented, specifications and requirements are defined.

3. Software implementation Phase

This phase begins with the installation and testing of the required in-office software. All computer equipment is installed and configured. As the software component is being introduced, it is an ideal time to train system administrators and educate them in advance of user training during the Pilot Phase.

4. Pilot Phase

The Pilot is a live system test using a subset of the entire fleet. The purpose of the Pilot is to complete end-to-end testing of the system under real-life conditions so that any remaining issues may be identified and addressed. Limiting the number of vehicles used in the Pilot simplifies troubleshooting and ensures the mobile data hardware and software is operating as expected, before the entire fleet is mobilized. A resolution plan will be developed to investigate and resolve any remaining issues. The training of dispatchers, supervisors and driver trainers occurs during this phase.

5. Rollout Phase

The remainder of the in-vehicle equipment is provided, and the Project Manager facilitates installation and activation of the equipment. Drivers are trained on the equipment during this phase. The Project Completion period begins once all the vehicles are rolled out, and lasts for 30 to 60 days. Any new issues should be reported at this time. The Project Completion period concludes with System Acceptance, and then the project transitions into the Long-Term Support phase.

6. Long-Term Support Phase

Following the completion of the project, support for the system is provided according to the terms of the Long-Term Support Agreement outlined in the contract.

In many cases, the project will enter the Long-Term Support phase three to six months after Kickoff; however there can be exceptions to this. Depending on the nature of your operations, the fleet size, and the extent of approved customization required, implementation may take longer to complete. These variables must be taken into account in order to set a realistic time line.

Managing the Transition

The implementation of a complex automated dispatching solution brings a lot of change. Change management helps the company make this transition. Managing the transition of an organization in flux is key. If handled well, implementing the new system will be a positive experience. There are a number of strategies you can adopt that will minimize the impact on your employees, and allow you to effectively introduce technology into the workplace.

1. Prepare Employees

Possibly the most important step you can take to ensure widespread acceptance of the new technological system is to prepare your employees for change in advance in order to minimize surprises. By consistently engaging staff around the realities of implementing new technology, taxi companies can diminish resistance and help their employees effectively deal with change.

Communication is vitally important to a smooth implementation and transitioning process. Strategies to maintain this communication with your employees may include holding staff meetings to explain the system overhaul, where you describe the benefits that the new technology will provide, and give employees a realistic picture of what issues they may encounter so that they can focus their attention on problem solving. As well, launching internal communication campaigns is an effective way to prepare employees, and helps them feel connected and up-to-date on the implementation process.

2. Train System Users

Training is not only an essential step in the implementation process, but it is also a means of creating trust around the new system. The most effective training methods involve creating a highly skilled user group within your organization. These 'Super Users' can then be relied on to help train and transfer knowledge to other employees. According to Kathiresan: "It helps to frame the technology in the context of real-life situations, and how it will help the employee perform their job. It is important to invest in super users and backup trainers from within the agency who can be relied on once the implementation has been completed."

For employees, such as drivers, whose jobs are performed outside of the office, extending technology training to the vehicle environment helps minimize anxiety towards the technology. Spending one-on-one time with drivers and performing ride-along sessions helps to familiarize them with the technology much quicker than being in a training room.

Life After Implementation

Once the solution is in place, and your employees have all been trained to use the technology, there is still more change to manage. New technology affects not only the work processes of the employees, but modifies roles and responsibilities. Increased efficiency might translate into fewer people doing the same job. However, if employees are involved throughout the implementation process, and allowed to provide feedback, this can become a time of learning and development. During the transition, people with particular skills may have more opportunity to play important roles and demonstrate abilities in new valuable areas.

Drivers and dispatchers see the benefit of automated dispatching in their day-to-day operations. Drivers can easily find pick-ups with in-vehicle turn-by-turn directions, communicate with canned text messages and provide passengers with credit and debit card payment options. Dispatchers can view and track all the vehicles in their fleet at a glance, which means they don't have to call drivers to find out where they are located.

A significant organizational transformation that occurs is increased accountability. With a system featuring automated dispatching, AVL and mobile computing technologies, drivers are more responsive to both their customers and dispatchers.

With their everyday tasks streamlined, dispatchers will be increasingly concerned with providing excellent customer service and resolving unmatched trips. An automated dispatching solution allows taxi companies to focus their energy on their customers.

According to Wu: "One thing taxi companies should be prepared for is how quickly they will come to be dependent on the technology. The technology is a tool, and you can get as much out of it as you want. In the end, it is about using technology to improve business."

Conclusion

A successful automated dispatching implementation is the result of a well-built relationship between a technology provider and their client. The Project Manager must be flexible, adapting to their client's requirements and concerns, and fully involve the client in every phase of implementation. The client is responsible for being dedicated to the implementation at every stage. This includes engaging employees early on in the implementation process, and constantly looking ahead to anticipate challenges.

Communication is an essential element in a smooth implementation. Project Managers use communication as a means for keeping the client well-informed and updated on the project's status; clients use it as a tool to reduce employee anxiety towards the new system.

Trapeze IntelliFleet

A Complete Automated taxi dispatch Solution

Trapeze IntelliFleet is a comprehensive electronic dispatching and automatic vehicle tracking solution. IntelliFleet provides true zone dispatching, automated call taking, fast and secure card payment processing, real-time location information for all vehicles, and much more. Taxi companies using IntelliFleet see a wide range of benefits such as: more trips per day, increased driver safety, improved customer service, fair call distribution, and decreased operating costs. Contact Trapeze to find out how your company can start seeing the benefits of Trapeze IntelliFleet. www.trapezegrup.com

