

ASK THE EXPERTS

TO START WITH, CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE COMPANY?

“I started the company two and a half years ago and I’ve been in haulage all my life – grew up with it. We have customers from down in London to up in Glasgow and they’ll want a local job doing. Now for me to ring my contacts that I’ve built up over the years down in London “have you got a vehicle available”, “No”, then you ring the next one... that could take an hour of your time. But we use Courier Exchange, so you just put it on and forget about it – that does the work for you.”

TO WHAT DEGREE WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE TECH SIDE OF THINGS IS CHANGING THE WAY YOU DO YOUR JOB?

“I think the online world is a big thing. You know, when I started there was no Google or anything like that or SatNav or anything. Your drivers had mapbooks, the A-Z etc ... you knew “he’s a good driver in London”, “he won’t touch London” – it could take all day to do that. Whereas now that’s all changed, it’s one of the good things that’s come in. Of course with SatNav coming in every Tom, Dick and Harry bought a van because they think they can do the job but actually they haven’t got the experience. They can get from A to B but things like securing a load and keeping customer service high just aren’t there... which is why we’re so successful.”

WHAT ABOUT TELEMATICS AND TRACKING OF VEHICLES?

“It depends on the job and what it is. If it’s just a pallet that wants to be going on the network well then it doesn’t really matter. On the Courier Exchange, if we give a job and we’ve never used that member before, particularly when it is a top customer of ours or it’s got to be there by a certain time... if they’re tracked that just gives a lot of peace of mind. So I can have a quick look, “Here we are, yeah ok he’s on track” and then you don’t have ask them and you know you’re not getting any lies back.”

SO WHAT’S YOUR APPROACH TO TIME-CRITICAL WORK AND WHERE DO YOU THINK THE INDUSTRY IS HEADED?

“Well, you can use your own drivers but when a customer needs it time-critical and they want it collecting, they’ll say something like “it should have been there yesterday, it needs to go”. Right ok, you might have your own driver who’s 25 miles away, so he could be there in 40 minutes... we’d rather put it on Courier Exchange anyway so he can get somebody that’s literally on the same industrial estate. They might be £20 dearer, or they might be less... but you ring your customer and say “I’ve got my lad here who could be there in 40 minutes or I’ve got somebody else who’s a little dearer but he can be there within literally 5 minutes”. If it’s time critical, then the 5-minute guy gets it and here’s there - there’s no pressure. You know, if he’s 25 miles away anything can happen in that 25 miles. The guy that’s on the estate, well he’s there so he gets the job. But also it’s the response to the customer. As he’s ringing, the job’s going on the system and by the time he puts the phone down it’s on the system. Then the phones go ringing, I call him back within 30 seconds with a price and a time...”

SO WHAT ABOUT THE USUAL ONE THAT EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT, YOU KNOW, THE ‘UBER’-TYPE OPERATIONS OF THIS WORLD AND SO FORTH. THE MODEL THAT SAYS ANYBODY WITH SPARE CAPACITY—WHETHER YOU’RE A BED MANUFACTURER OR A GUY WITH HIS BROTHER’S TRANSIT—CAN PICK UP THE ODD BIT OF WORK. DO YOU THINK THAT’S SOMETHING THAT WILL BE AROUND TO STAY?

“Transport is probably one of the oldest games going and it’ll always be there. Things need moving. It’s been around for hundreds of years. It depends. If somebody is round the corner with a van they might be doing house removals for next to nothing – and there will always be a customer for that. It’s not what we do, and there’s always a customer for what we do. The job is pretty cut-throat anyway. They’re not going to get it on service because they haven’t got the experience so they’ll be getting it on price. So if you go too cheap, then it’s not worth doing and both service and safety will suffer.”



AN INTERVIEW WITH **CHRIS DEE** FOUNDER OF TOPGRADE LOGISTICS