By Scott Ball

TAKING AIM AGAINST DISTRACTED DRIVING

I t's the nightmare no business wants to have: one of its service vehicles gets into an accident because the driver was distracted. Not only is there a liability issue, there's the human toll on both the driver and the victims, plus the effect on customer service and company reputation.

Distracted driving is both dangerous and illegal. You'd think people would have figured that out, yet it remains one of the top causes of fatal accidents. In Ontario, three people died because of it in the first three weeks of 2015 alone. But distracted driving is not just an issue with phone use (both talk and text). Everything from swilling coffee and messing with the GPS, to responding to a dispatch summons on an in-vehicle computer also qualifies.

Yet despite the risks, people still allow themselves to be sidetracked from concentrating on driving safely. Thankfully, there's technology that a business owner can have installed to help keep his technicians' eyes on the road.

In-Vehicle Display Management Systems ▶

Even with the best mount, a computer can still be unsafe if the technician tries to use it while driving. That's where app design comes in. An app that wants the user to type while driving is an accident waiting to happen. Any app used in a vehicle has to be designed for safety first. For example, when the vehicle is in motion, the use of a "blank-it" type of software can blank out the tablet screen and disable the keyboard and other input devices, helping enhance the safety for connected field workers.

TIPS FOR MOUNTING COMPUTER DEVICES

- Attach to the dashboard, not the floor
- Don't use mounts that allow the device to swing sideways
- Install the device so that it is "airbag safe"
- Ensure that the device can be easily undocked and replaced
- Ensure that use of the device, when mounted, is ergonomically correct

GOOD DEVICE MOUNTS REMOVE PROJECTILES

While it's often critical to a business to have a computer in a service vehicle – it is, after all, the technician's mobile office – safety always has to be a priority. Part of the solution is in employee training, but there are hardware and software considerations as well.

It starts with proper mounting of necessary equipment. Industrial Velcro is not an option, nor is tossing the computer on the passenger seat. In a sudden stop, an unsecured or improperly secured computer can become a lethal projectile.

The mount needs to be a good fit for the vehicle. If it interferes with its safe operation, obstructs the deployment of air bags, or encroaches on passenger space, it becomes a hazard. If it's ergonomically unsound, the technician could suffer repetitive stress injury (RSI), meaning lessened productivity, and time off to recover. And in our litigious world, that could lead to lawsuits against the company.

A good mount needs to be easy to use. It should tilt and rotate to let the user adjust the operating position. Securing and removing the computer needs to be a one-handed operation; if it's too difficult, chances are a technician in a hurry will just drop the device on the passenger seat and ignore the mount. If the mount swivels so both driver and passenger can use the device, it needs to be designed so the device won't swing, uncontrolled, and injure someone. And the mount has to have been crash tested to ensure that it's safe in case of an emergency.

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