

How To Find The Right GPS Fleet Tracking System For Your Organization

GPS Fleet tracking can save you time, fuel, and other expenses. Imagine you're a fleet manager looking for a global positioning system (GPS) to track the vehicles you're responsible for. Choosing the right system and the right company to install it can be a hassle so how do you make the right choice?

Cost is always a primary consideration, but fleet managers and vendors cite other points that deserve careful consideration too, such as ease of use, the track record of the supplier, and the potential for integrating the GPS with other systems already in use within a fleet operation, such as mobile communications and maintenance management software. The most important of any of these questions is whether implementing GPS will save the fleet money. The goal is to tailor a system to get the best ROI, and save money.

What is GPS?

The global positioning system (GPS) is a network of satellites orbiting Earth that enables users to pinpoint the location of things – in this case, fleet vehicles – on the ground. Many systems work in conjunction with a mobile communications system to transmit information to a server for presentation on a Web site; there, fleet managers can enter a user name and password to view maps that show vehicle locations, and scrutinize data presented in report form. There are also systems that collect and transmit data wirelessly from a vehicle's engine computer and from a GPS unit, allowing fleet managers to monitor vehicle diagnostics and location information. Typically a small box containing a GPS chip set and a wireless modem is installed under the dash of each vehicle; a small antenna is mounted inside the windshield.



Finding the Right System

Following is a step by step process designed to help you choose the right system for your fleet. Before you begin you will need:

- A list of all your vehicles including makes/models/years
- Type of business you are in

Step 1 - Identify your own needs and organize them so you can get an accurate and timely estimate from companies:

- How many vehicles do you have?
- How often will you be tracking them?
- What type of business are you in?
- Do you have many different types of vehicles or all the same?
- Does the system need to be covert? (hidden from view)
- Does your insurance company offer a discount for such a system and if so, what are the requirements?

Step 2 - Search locally for companies that specialize in GPS Tracking:

- There are many national GPS Tracking companies, but for a small to medium sized organization a local firm may be your best bet. The larger GPS companies operate on sales volume but are most often right around the same price as the local guy.
- The only advantage you may get with a big corporation is the option to lease or finance the units. Many businesses can enjoy the money saving benefits of GPS Tracking but do not have the capital available for the initial investment.
- Many smaller GPS companies also offer financing, but you will most likely have to do it through a 3rd party bank or leasing company.

Step 3 - Speak with these companies individually and take notes. Here are some useful questions to ask:

- **Do I need to install any software to use your system, or is it web-based?** Some companies have software that you will need to load on your office computers to use their system, while other companies use a web-based portal that can be accessed from any computer with internet. Web-Based portals tend to be less of a hassle, especially if you want to view your trucks while you are away from the office.
- **What information does your system give me and how far back does the history go?** At a minimum you will need Speed, Direction, and status (ignition on or off). Your vehicle history can tell you route logs, time spent idling, and give a stop report.
- **How quickly does your system update?** GPS Tracking systems update periodically, for instance if a system updates every 60 seconds it means your vehicle history will display where the truck was in 60 second intervals. The map of where the vehicle was will be a road with a dot every half mile or so. The shorter the updates the closer the dots will be together, but the bigger your monthly charge will be due to increased data usage.
- **Does your system have the capability to monitor different parts of the vehicle?** This is useful if you wish to know if a pump is on, or if a PTO was engaged.
- **What type of antenna do you use?** An under dash antenna is covert, inexpensive, and works fairly well. A roof mount antenna is small but can be seen on the roof. It's more expensive but offers the best performance especially around buildings.
- **Do you use your own installers, or do you subcontract the work?** This is important for turnaround time on repairs as well as the quality of the installation.
- **What is your turnaround time on repairs and transfers?** If and when a problem does occur you must choose a company that will repair your unit at no charge and in a timely manner. Also when old vehicles are taken off the road and replaced with new ones they must come out to you to transfer the unit from one vehicle to another.

Step 4 - Determine Pricing. It is important to ask the following questions regarding pricing:

- What is my monthly charge per vehicle?
- Does this include maintenance?
- How does the tracking interval affect the monthly charge?
- Do you offer financing?
- Do you offer leasing?
- What is the installation charge?

With this information you can determine what system and what company is right for you. Remember, you will be doing business with these people long after they install your system, so make sure you feel comfortable with your GPS provider.

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