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AF Blakemore Takes Driver Performance to the Next Level with ORBCOMM Scorecards

AF Blakemore uses ORBCOMM's Driver Performance Scoring to motivate drivers and transport managers. By incorporating a program of data capture, monitoring, reviewing and a straightforward scoring system, the family-run business has seen a cultural shift in safety in the organisation.

The company

In 1917, Arthur and Harriet Blakemore opened their first grocery store on Merridale Street, Wolverhampton, UK. Since then the company has diversified into retail, wholesale distribution, food service, logistics and shopfitting and grown to become one of the UK's largest privately-owned family businesses, with a turnover of approximately £1.1 billion.

Today, AF Blakemore operates more than 250 Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) and 190 trailers, and delivers to over 950 SPAR stores across England and Wales.

The challenge

Hard braking, harsh acceleration, speeding, hard cornering. These are not just unsafe driving behaviours; they can also add to fuel costs through inefficient driving. After more than a decade of working with ORBCOMM's telematics, AF Blakemore wanted to effectively address driver behaviour in their organisation, and the introduction of driver performance scoring has been a key part of this. With hundreds of vehicles and drivers, it's crucial to know exactly how each person is performing, how they are driving from week to week and where improvements can be made.

As well as focusing on drivers, AF Blakemore wanted to focus on the management tier. Transport managers in each region now monitor driver performance as part of their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This helps to foster buy-in at all levels. Dave Higgs, Group Logistics Compliance Manager with AF Blakemore, says driver performance scoring is a key tool in incorporating driver safety as part of the fabric of the organisation.

"One of my focuses this year was to get buy-in from transport managers across the divisions and depots. This is not about criticising the drivers; it's about speaking to drivers and explaining to them how they can get better."

The opportunity

AF Blakemore introduced the driver performance scoring programme in early 2020 to improve fleet safety and fuel economy. Working with their driver trainers, the company decided to go for a straightforward rating system. There are three statuses: red, amber, and green. These correlate to a grading in each category from A to C.
Drivers are graded in 26 areas including idling, harsh braking, over-speeding, harsh acceleration, and anticipation. Drivers in the green are operating safely and efficiently, while drivers in the red category may need training or improvement in one or several categories.

Driver scorecards and reporting enable teams to communicate performance trends and identify risky driving behaviour. The data enables transport managers to open a dialogue with drivers, where they can share league standings, encourage good behaviour, identify areas for improvement and where further training may be required. Ahead of launching the program, the ORBCOMM team worked with closely with AF Blakemore to set up metrics in ORBCOMM's platform.

ORBCOMM worked with driver trainers to look at areas like anticipation, idling, wait times and acceleration—and adjusted vehicle profiles to make it fair to everyone involved. If something was impossible to achieve, it would alienate drivers. If it was too easy, there would be nothing to improve. These metrics had to be reasonable and fair.
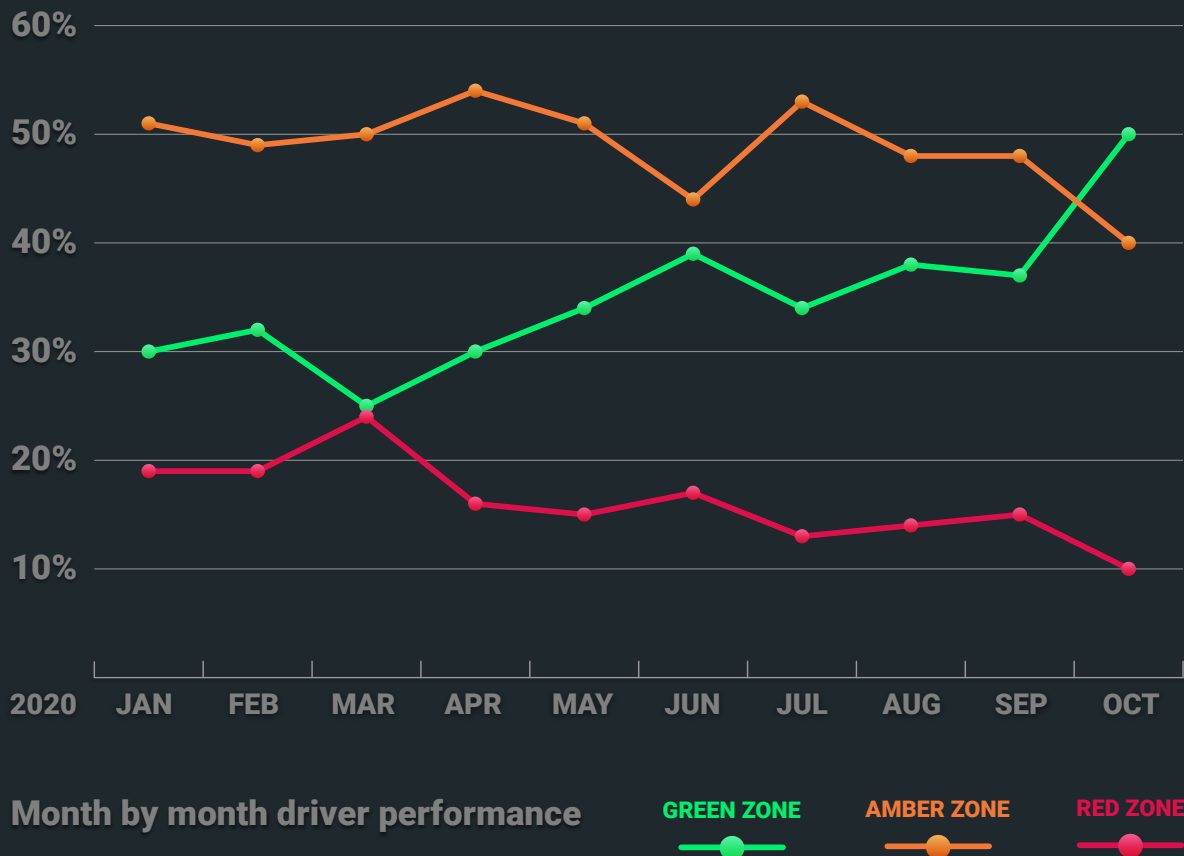
AF Blakemore's fleet performance since the launch of the programme in 2020, with a steady increase in drivers in the green zone and decrease of drivers in the red zone.

The results

In October 2020, the programme has been running for approximately nine months, and the results speak for themselves. AF Blakemore has seen a steady increase in drivers achieving green status, from 30% to 50%, showing safer and more efficient driving. The percentage of drivers in the red has dropped from 20% to 10%, where behaviours are riskier and inefficient. Amber behaviours have decreased from more than 50% to below 40%.

The company can also break down the data to compare driver performance between depots. In their Talbot Green Depot, for example, in January 2020, 21% of drivers were Green. By October 2020, 100% of drivers were Green.

In their Hastings Depot, it's a similar story. In January 2020, 55% of drivers were green, 32% amber and 13% in red. By October, the figures had changed significantly, with 81% in green, 19% in amber and 0% in red. When green behaviours are rising, amber and red behaviours are actively decreasing, resulting in a safer, more economical fleet.

Each week, the AF Blakemore team reviews performance data week-on-week to monitor progress. As a direct result of monitoring driver performance, week-on-week and using the data to talk to drivers, the company has seen a steady improvement. Higgs says, "We launched with transport managers in June. On the back of that, we've had really good success. Our Talbot Green and Hastings Depots have really come on board with it. We've seen great improvements."

The implementation

To ensure driver performance scoring would be equitable to all drivers in their operation, AF Blakemore was able to make some tweaks to ORBCOMM's configurable scoring algorithms. ORBCOMM has developed unique algorithms to determine how a driver is operating the vehicle and assign them a performance score. The team from ORBCOMM worked closely with AF Blakemore to set up scoring metrics and vehicle profiling to more accurately monitor drivers.

The company wanted the system to be challenging but achievable. Higgs says, "Everything is set up correctly. Vehicles are set up to their parameters. We believe we have a fair way of allowing a driver to get into the green. It's not too easy and it's not too hard."

The programme is started by internally promoting the scores, sharing league tables with drivers and letting the concept flow through the business.

MPG/Driver Performance Weekly: Talbot Green Depot 2020

MPG · GREEN ZONE · RED ZONE
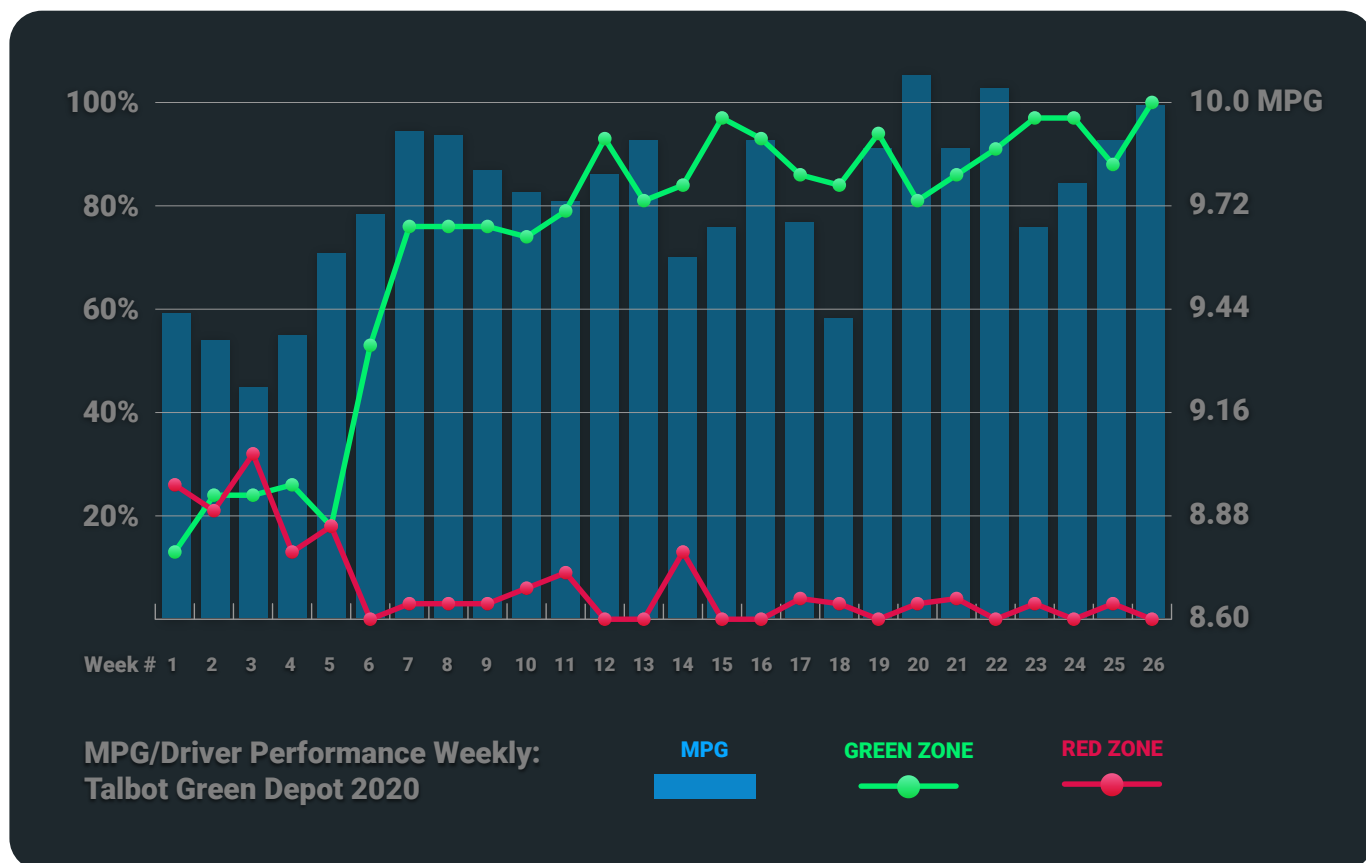
Open communication with drivers

The success of the programme relies on an open and consistent dialogue throughout the organisation and incorporating driver performance scoring on every level. The scorecards open dialogue between drivers and transport managers across the fleet.

"You know, drivers come in and say, I'm driving this vehicle as best I can, and we can say, no, you're not. But it's just a matter of speaking to them. We're not always going out with them (on the road), we're not sending driver trainers out all the time; it's about speaking to people and getting their buy-in," adds Higgs.

By using this open communication and incorporating data-backed information in discussions with drivers, Higgs and his transport management team have seen huge success across their depots. He's impressed by their Talbot Green results. There, drivers are not only increasing their green driving but actively exiting red driving behaviour.

"Our Talbot Green Depot has hit 100% (in the green) and is about 95-100% in the green each week now. Their drivers are coming in and asking for their score cards. It's been a really good experience," Higgs says.

Engaging drivers on fuel economy

Fuel performance and improving miles per gallon (MPG) were areas besides safety that AF Blakemore wanted to focus on. By monitoring MPG as part of their driver performance programme, AF Blakemore can see the

"Anticipation and coasting are two of the things that drive MPG, so we are focusing on those. Because they are the ones that bring pound notes back into the business."

economic impact of specific driving habits, like the effect of idling or harsh braking on fuel consumption—and help drivers to work towards improving them.

This graph shows the steady improvement in MPG for drivers at the Talbot Green depot in 2020. As the green driving behaviours pick up and red behaviours drop, it's matched by an improvement in MPG. At the start of the programme in week 1 the MPG was at 9.3. By week 26, the MPG had improved to 9.78.

Higgs says, "At Talbot Green, we're seeing an increase in MPG by .3 or .4 percent. You might say .3 percent of a difference is not a lot, but when you're spending millions on fuel per year, it's a massive number. The driver scorecards are the biggest impact in this."

The company is planning to double down on its work on improving MPG next year. "Our target MPG across the group is 11. The driver scorecards are the biggest thing on this, because we are getting that buy-in from drivers," says Higgs.

The depth of data makes this quest for improving MPG easier. While other external factors do have an impact on the likes of MPG, Dave Higgs's outlook is to control what you can, and driver performance scoring enables him and his team to do that.

"Anticipation and coasting are two of the things that drive MPG, so we are focusing on those. Because they are the ones that bring pound notes back into the business," says Higgs.

Looking ahead

As drivers, transport managers and the company start to reap the benefits of driver performance scoring, Higgs is not resting on his laurels. They're already planning on updates to the program. With fine-tuning, they're looking to get the ideal balance for their drivers and depots. As drivers adjust to the friendly competition, no-one wants to be in the red. The competition is good motivation. Higgs says they'll begin to make it a little bit more challenging to help drivers perform even better.

"I believe, what we'll do, once we've got more people in the green, is start changing it to make it a bit harder to get there. We've got the first part done, now we're going to make it a bit more of a challenge for the drivers. Once they're in the green, they don't want to come out of the green," he says.

About ORBCOMM

ORBCOMM is a global leader and innovator in the industrial Internet of Things, providing solutions that connect businesses to their assets to deliver increased visibility and operational efficiency. The company offers a broad set of asset monitoring and control solutions, including seamless satellite and cellular connectivity, unique hardware and powerful applications, all backed by end-to-end customer support, from installation to deployment to customer care. ORBCOMM has a diverse customer base including premier OEMs, solutions customers and channel partners spanning transportation, supply chain, warehousing and inventory, heavy equipment, maritime, natural resources, and government. For more information, visit www.orbcomm.com.

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