



THE HALLMARK

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Yes, you can lessen fuel shock

For years I commuted a great distance to our editorial offices in Cleveland. I no longer make that drive. Thank goodness. As gasoline surpasses \$4 a gallon I can't afford filling up every couple of days. I can only imagine the distress fuel prices are causing those of you with more than a few service vehicles on the road.

Some companies are taking aggressive steps to control fuel costs. Rottler Pest & Lawn Solutions, St. Louis, uses technology to better manage its vehicles and fuel costs while also improving field efficiencies and reducing accidents. When Mike Rottler, company president, shared the following information at the Lawn Care Summit in Atlanta this past December many of us didn't realize how high fuel prices would be this spring, in spite of warnings. Is \$5-a-gallon gasoline in our near future? Hope not.

Consider some of the technology Rottler uses to help control fuel costs and improve safety:

▶ **Drive cam with streaming video from service vehicles.** Exceptional forces such as hard braking, swerving or collision triggers the drive cam, which records video of the critical seconds before and after the triggered event. Rottler says most accidents happen with employees who have been on

the job 12 months or less. He says the drive cam has reduced the incidence of accidents in his company. Fewer accidents mean fewer claims.

▶ **GPS with features to monitor fleet maintenance, vehicle idling and after-hours use.** It can also be used as a time clock to verify employee time sheets. Rottler adopted GPS years ago. "It's not going to solve all of your ills," says Rottler, adding it must be managed closely to be effective.

▶ **Routing software.** The system Rottler uses can be modified to route service set-ups or service orders. It also schedules around confirmed days and/or times.

▶ **Handheld devices.** These handy units provide field personnel with a tremendous amount of information when they're in the field, including valuable customer information. The devices Rottler techs use allow bar code scanning and can email invoices to customers. Because of nearly universal Wi-Fi coverage, field personnel can upload and download in the field and post to the office. Rottler says his employees like the devices.

▶ **SOTI MobiControl Software.** This program provides remote access to troubleshoot the handheld devices, which must have access via a data plan, Wi-Fi or ActiveSync. While connected, it allows you to monitor and/or control the device — and also view the connection status and battery life on each device.

Rottler recommends owners considering adopting the preceding or other new or unfamiliar technology develop a plan. Choose one or two initiatives per year, and test the technology on a small scale before rolling it out company-wide. Also, consider whether the technology matches your company's culture.

Finally, closely monitor the performance of the technology, even in the testing phase, to determine the measurable return you can confidently expect on your investment.

"The cutting edge of technology is also the bleeding edge," says Rottler.

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