Ten Factors to Consider When Buying an electronic-Proof-of-Delivery (ePOD) Solution

In today's world companies increasingly see the need for implementing a so-called electronic proof of delivery (ePOD). An ePOD solution is in essence a method to establish the fact that the recipient has received the contents/items sent by the sender by means of capturing the data electronically through a handheld computing device.

The rising usage of internet shopping is heavily influencing this. It is expected that European online retail will continue to grow at a rate of at least 11% per year. This has triggered the need for highly responsive e-fulfilment operations. On top of this, customers are starting to expect to be able to choose their delivery window. This is in part triggered by the home delivery operations from the big retailers such as Tesco, Sainsbury's etc. According to recent research, customers expect a delivery window of at least three hours when it comes to online purchases.

This has translated into a significant shift in B2C vs B2B parcels. Just 6 years ago, B2B parcels dominated the UK market with 74% of the market value vs only 15% for B2C, whereas today B2C is accounting for 34% of the total domestic parcel market value vs B2B at 54%.

Due to these pressures, the parcel industry has found it impossible to fulfil their customer's requirements without implementing a solid ePOD solution. And this is now filtering across all the other industry segments where the need for a proof-of-delivery exists. The customer is expecting the same performance from their suppliers as they are experiencing in their private lives when shopping online.

So how do you select the right ePOD solution for your business? This can be a minefield as a quick search on the internet provides you almost instantly with a long list of potential providers of ePOD software, some even for free! From our experience, here are ten factors we believe you should be considering when buying your ePOD solution.

1. Exception management

An important function for an ePOD solution is how it is able to handle exceptions to the standard workflow. Examples include not being able to deliver the correct quantities, any damages, customer is not available to take delivery, any out of sequence deliveries, a delivery-by-pass etc. The ePOD solution needs to be able to handle this real-life situation easily and effortlessly without loosing the accuracy and efficiency of the delivery process. Important aspects are the use of GPS for accurate locationing, the ability to take photos to provide evidence, time & date stamping, capturing any notes, and the use of reason codes.

2. Reducing 'false missing goods' claims

A significant cost to traditional delivery operations can be claims the recipients make about 'missing goods' even though it has been delivered. The ePOD solution can assist greatly by enforcing a signature whilst taking GPS, time & date stamps upon delivery. A process that you could also be considering includes the positive recipient identification, for instance with a PIN code or barcode in case of high value or sensitive goods. When a recipient is not available, then a photo of the item left in situ could assist in reducing false claims, as well as sending a Proof-of-Delivery notice in real-time to the recipient's email address or mobile phone as soon as the delivery has taken place.

3. Managing delivery windows

With the increasing expectations of tight delivery windows, it is absolutely essential that the ePOD solution can handle this accurately. There is of course an important benefit of getting this right: it will significantly reduce the number of re-deliveries that need to be done thereby reducing the average cost per delivery. Functions that can assist with this process include the ability to provide accurate estimated time of arrival (ETA) calculations, any pre-arrival notifications by e-mail and/or SMS, the use of GPS positioning linked to the route and satellite navigation software, as well as being able to auto-dial a customer to advice on an imminent arrival.

4. Dealing with Peak Season

Most industries have a seasonal pattern to their operations. Therefore, any chosen ePOD solution would need to allow for this. Key therefore is the ability to easily scale-up by executing quick, remote software installations to additional devices, perhaps also allowing for bring your own device (BYOD). Another aspect to consider is how long a new employee, sub-contractor or temporary worker will need for training before being fully up and running using the ePOD solution.

5. Integration to Back Office Systems

Unless you are looking for a fully stand-alone solution, the ease-of-integration into your existing back-office systems is an essential item. Typically, ePOD solutions are integrated with route scheduling, job booking and invoicing systems. However, increasingly there is a demand for integrating it also with fleet management, communication, and customer relationship management systems. And when integrating with multiple systems, the complexity increases substantially. Therefore, the ePOD solution should allow for robust and easy to configure integration with your systems.

6. Vehicle related information

Increasingly legislation is impacting the workplace, which in the case of deliveries includes the vehicle. Therefore, an ePOD solution ideally includes modules or integration with applications that cater for vehicle safety checks, mileage recording, fuel consumption, accident reporting, driver behaviour, parking notices etc. The vehicle checks in particular are beneficial as it will reduce the risk of downtime due to vehicle break down (and thereby missing SLAs) and also provides comprehensive data on the vehicle fleet that can be used for preventative maintenance planning.

7. Lone worker

Organisations have a duty of care for its employees, and as most delivery drivers work alone, an ePOD solution would benefit from including functionality to satisfy Lone Worker related legislation such as BS8484. This will assist in protecting your employees when working alone or in hazardous environments by allowing them to be in constant contact with their office or helpdesk.

8. SatNav

It almost goes without saying that a good ePOD solution has decent satellite navigation software embedded. It will allow for quick and easy determination of the most efficient route to each destination, usually with dynamic re-routing to cope with travel disruptions or ad-hoc changes to scheduled delivery route.

Depending on the fleet of vehicles you are using, you would also want to have functionality built in on potential driving hazards such as low bridges, narrow lanes or restricted access. Another aspect would be to use map grid references rather than postcodes so that you can cope with situations where the actual delivery point is not near the building entrance.

9. Customer Relationship Management

Increasingly companies are focused on improving their customer service, especially at the point of interaction with their customer. Therefore, an ePOD solution should allow for the ability to add questionnaires or surveys at the end of the delivery process so that critical feedback for improved business operations can be collected. These surveys should be able to be displayed 'mandated' against certain rules (for instance deliveries over a certain value) or randomly. Another function could be the potential for product-up sell, for instance additional insurance with an electrical item that has just been delivered. In essence it is important that the ePOD solution has the ability to maximize the value of the customer interaction.

10. Voice Communications

As the ePOD solution is likely to run on a device that has the ability to take voice communications, it provides an interesting opportunity to reduce overall operations costs by eliminating another device (the mobile phone). The ePOD solution should therefore have the ability to integrate and handle voice communications. Naturally, you would probably want to restrict what the devices is used for by setting pre-determined phone numbers or numbers associated with the current delivery route. It should also allow for incoming calls from, for instance, the depot. The Health & Safety aspect should not be underestimated and therefore needs to be fully understood as driving whilst making calls can lead to hazardous situations.

Sources

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