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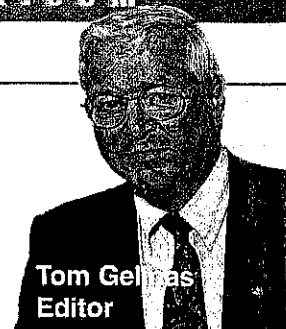
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EDITORIAL

The Difference Is the Return



Tom Gelinas
Editor

It's been fascinating to watch products appear in the market over the years. And I've been watching them long enough to remember when bias-ply tires were common and gasoline engines still pulled some trailers. Over those years, there has been a constant stream of new products, indeed new technologies, that have been touted to be the biggest, the best, the most economical, the most efficient etc. Some have become commonplace. Others have either disappeared from the scene or struggled to stay alive.

An example of the latter? Consider all the fuel-saving magnets and "turbulators" that have been offered at trade shows. Do they work? I really don't know, but I don't know of any fleet with good numbers that's using them.

Why do some products or technologies become successful while others fall by the wayside? Clearly, it's because the good ones offer a return on the investment made to purchase, install and maintain them. When radials first appeared on the scene, a fleet manager had to decide if the additional initial cost was worth making. Such a decision isn't possible today as over-the-road bias-ply tires simply are no longer available.

Because of the operational efficiencies they offer, other technologies are also becoming almost commonplace. Consider, for example, onboard scales. According to Air-Weigh's Peter Powell, "The Air-Weigh Trailer Scale saves the average operator thousands of dollars per year by eliminating costs associated with check-weighing, including out-of-route miles, wasted time and fees. An on-board scale provides an accurate indication to the operator that he's fully loaded and can head right to the highway without fear of being overweight."

Let's assume an operator check-weighs just one or two loads per week and is delayed only 30 minutes at a scale even a single mile out

of his normal route each time. Add the driver's time to the cost of wasted fuel and the \$7 scale fee, and you've got a total check-weigh cost of at least \$20 to \$25. On just one load a week, that's more than a \$1000 a year. That's a return that every trucker can understand, and it doesn't include any fines avoided.

Increased demand for factory installation on-board truck scales has led Air-Weigh to introduce an in-dash, fully integrated, digital scale as a direct replacement for the traditional two-inch dash air suspension gauge. As a result even an experienced driver can rely on the accuracy of the readout and take advantage of the potential savings.

The wide acceptance of LEDs offers another example of how a financial return makes it an easy decision to spend a few dollars more on a superior product. While Grote was the first to offer lamps using light emitting diodes to the trucking industry, all major suppliers now offer not only complete LED product lines but continually improve their product offerings—all based on industry demand. Are they worth an increased initial investment? Without a doubt. As a Peterbilt spokesperson said when the company first began offering LEDs on its Model 387, "It would not be unusual for a single LED light to last the entire lifetime of a truck."

There are many other examples of products or technologies that have proven themselves in fleet operations—maintenance management software, multiplexed electrical systems, synthetic lubricants, many onboard electronic systems—among them. Success for a supplier hoping to make a mark in trucking depends on the return he can offer a fleet manager. And success for a fleet manager depends on the decisions he makes when looking for a return on his equipment investments. •