

2017 Fleet Management Trends: Upfitting

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File photo

Lighter-weight truck and van equipment, more standardization, and ergonomic planning should improve the process and delivery timing of the upfitting of commercial vehicles in 2017, according to fleet management experts.

More and more, fleets are looking to reduce weight added to the chassis to meet regulations and reduce fuel use, said Spero Skarlatos, manager of truck excellence for Element Fleet Management.

"This lightening of the load is being achieved with several components to include aluminum, composites (including fiberglass) and new manufacturing techniques to reduce the amount of steel used," Skarlatos said. "Just as chassis are utilizing these materials to conform to EPA regulations, aftermarket and upfitting have followed suit to reduce fuel consumption."

Upfitters are looking to get ahead of enforcement of legislation governing unloaded vehicle weight (UWV) — how much the truck weighs with auxiliary equipment, as well as full fuel tanks, engine oil and coolants. The regulations apply to vehicles under 10,001

GVWR, which could include some chassis cab vehicles and requires stability control programming. Skarlatos is advising fleets not to wait to right-size the chassis.



Skarlatos

Commercial fleets are also increasingly looking to standardize, rather than customize, the equipment they add to vehicles to reduce any delivery delay.

"Standardization of vehicle selection and upfitting processes will allow fleets to become more efficient and decrease their ordering process time, which will ultimately reduce their order-to-delivery times," said Bill Gooden, a vehicle upfit consultant with LeasePlan.

In some cases, commercial fleet managers are improving their internal ordering by obtaining faster approvals of future budgets so they can place larger orders sooner. Other strategies can also improve order-to-delivery, said Cindy Gomez, Donlen's vice president of vehicle acquisition services.



Gooden

"In the cases where customers cannot forecast their orders, they are taking advantage of the pool programs that the OEMs offer to reduce order-to-delivery times," Gomez said. "By utilizing a pool program, customers have the ability to order vehicles without having driver assignments, and in some instances vehicles are pre-upfitted so that completed units can be delivered within two to three weeks of assignment."

Some larger fleets are increasing their use of pilot programs to test certain upfits, so they can make tweaks before submitting a large order.



Gomez

The wave of Euro-style vans that arrived about two years ago have become more ingrained in fleets, which has increased the need to bins and ladder racks for those vehicles, said Tom Coffey, vice president of sales and marketing for Merchants Fleet Management.

Fleets have also spent more time planning out driver ergonomics when equipping vehicles.

"By planning daily activity and safety into an upfit, we can reduce injury and wear and tear on the driver/service person; therefore, decreasing cost to the company and increasing productivity and quality of life for the employee," Skarlatos said.



Coffey

Aging baby boomers should bring an uptick in paratransit upfitting with a greater need for wheelchair-accessible vehicles.

"As the baby-boomer generation continues to age, so will the demand for wheelchair accessible vehicles," said Beth Kandrysawtz, CEO of Motorlease Corp. "We have noticed, and continue to expect to see, a real focus on developing technology specifically designed to increase efficiency and comfort for both the passengers and drivers of the vehicle."

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Kandrysawtz

