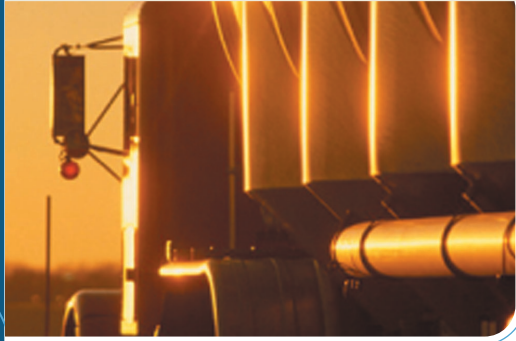


# Benson Tank Lines

A wireless fleet tracking system helps put Benson Tank Lines in the driver's seat.



## Keep on Tracking

A company must embrace change in order to grow and evolve. This is true in any industry but when it comes to transportation and logistics, adaptability and flexibility are not just important, they are imperative. Whether it be new safety regulations, heightened security, emerging technology or just keeping ahead of the competition, overcoming recent challenges and changes in the transportation industry has become a daily occurrence for many carriers.

For Canadian-based Benson Tank Lines, however, the process of evolving is nothing new. Change is something the company has embraced since its inception and an element of the business it takes seriously.

Back in 1967, Orval Benson had the idea to start a trucking company that would supply furnace oil deliveries for Shell Canada and the Vancouver Mainland. Four years later he brought his son Don on board and expanded the company to include deliveries of additional products in the Vancouver area with two trucks.

By 1987, the company had expanded into Washington, Oregon and Alberta, delivering chemicals, aviation fuels, petroleum products and lube oils for major companies. Now as president of Benson Tank Lines, Don Benson is keen on continuing the innovation and evolution of the company his father created nearly 40 years ago.

But the transportation industry is a lot different than it was back in 1967, and Don Benson is deeply aware of the need for his company to continue to evolve with the seemingly daily changes taking place in the field. One of those changes is the development of wireless technology, answering the call for better communication with drivers and increased visibility into routes and shipments.

## Opening Lines of Communication

With Benson Tank Lines continuing to grow, Don Benson was finding that the old method his company was using to communicate with drivers was becoming passe.

"We were using cell phones to communicate everything to the drivers and it was becoming clear that this was not the most efficient method of fleet management," says Benson. "We were spending a lot of money on cell phone calls to contact the drivers and we didn't have any visibility into routes or tracking capability to monitor driver performance." The company needed a way to reduce wasted time in its delivery routes and optimize operating costs.

One of the main challenges for Benson Tank was finding a reliable method of calculating when its vehicles were going off-road. Carriers are allowed to reclaim road tax on fuel when they go off-road, and this tax is a very large percentage of the total operating costs for a trucking company. With margins so tight in the trucking industry, access to this information was of utmost importance to Benson's operation.

Another factor Benson considered was the delays his fleets were experiencing at the borders. The turning point occurred when the company secured a contract with BP that had been in the works for some time.

"That contract requires us to haul jet fuel from Washington to Vancouver International Airport," notes Benson. "As part of the contract we go back and forth across the border." Since Sept. 11, the company's border times have been a burden as well as a large cost basis.

Benson knew it was time to change the way his operation communicated and the way he managed his fleet. He started to look into wireless tracking options including satellite and GSM/GPRS solutions.

After completing a trial of the product for a year and a half, Benson Tank Lines selected WebTech Wireless to provide the company with its Quadrant Solution, a GSM network-based tracking service. The WebTech solution utilizes an on-board, rugged GSM/GPRS device that combines a GPS receiver with a GSM/GPRS data modem and the provider's application software.

## Keep on Tracking

The solution also features J1708 capability. "This allows fleet operators to retrieve detailed vehicle performance data such as idle time, excessive braking, over-revving the engine, and fuel consumption - all information Benson Tank previously had not had access to," notes Cameron Fraser, CTO of webTech Wireless. This data gets integrated into enterprise systems for maintenance and logistics planning.

### Calling up Information

The on-board unit in each of Benson Tank's vehicles interfaces over the GSM network back into WebTech's Internet portal, which then allows dispatchers to open up a browser on their desktops and bring up information systems, such as mapping, to locate the vehicle. It also calls up history to see where the vehicle has been. In addition, the system displays geographical features such as geo-fencing. The geo-fencing capability allows operators to mark out areas such as depots or customer sites. When a vehicle enters or leaves the "fenced in" area, the system signals the unit to give auto alerts via cell phone, PDA, laptop, or pager.

Don Benson cites the geo-fencing feature as one of the solution's key applications. "Every time our trucks hit the border," says Benson, "the on-board unit registers with the geo-fencing system and creates a report with a paper back up. These reports get downloaded daily and everything gets uploaded on the Internet." This allows Benson to view the reports generated by the in-vehicle devices and see where the delays are in the routes.

"Because our contract with BP requires us to cross the border many times, our truckers often incur significant delays," notes Benson. "The contract is set up so that we can charge the customer for any delays lasting longer than 15 minutes, so being able to track this information is vital to our business."

### Overcoming Off-Road Obstacles

With any new technology implementation, however, there is always the chance of an unforeseen problem arising. Fortunately, Benson Tank and WebTech Wireless have been able to smoothly overcome all implementation challenges thus far.

"One challenge we had when we first deployed the system," recalls Fraser, "was making sure the coverage was going to be adequate." There were some gaps in the coverage initially due to the fact that Benson Tank goes off-road, but WebTech Wireless was able to solve this issue with the data storage capability of the GSM/GPRS unit.

"The unit has up to three weeks of on board data storage so the historical information is saved and uploaded when the vehicle comes back into coverage, keeping the management reports consistent," says Fraser.

The benefits of the deployment have been obvious to Benson Tank. "Just by being able to generate the reports and monitor the movement of trucks, we have been able to more accurately account for delays and bill our customers accordingly," says Benson. "Someone would then have to analyze all those cell phone bills and determine which charges to reverse to the drivers and which would be paid by the company.

"Now with WebTech's system, it is much more straightforward. The on-board unit is used for business only so there are no extra costs to consider."

Fraser notes that safety is also an important factor in the solution: "The ability to deliver a text message from a computer screen at your desk directly to a driver's screen works much better than a busy driver with a cell phone in his ear trying to scribble a message."

Being able to equip drivers with a wireless solution that optimizes operation costs and increases driver safety - now that is something Benson Tank Lines can get on board with.