Tips on managing your drivers

Driver management is a key element to a successful Private Hire/Taxi business. You rely on your drivers not only to be provide a service to your customers, but to be able to provide that service to the standards that you have set for your company.

Let's look at what the public, and corporate accounts want from their Private Hire/Taxi Company

There was a survey commissioned by the Office of Fair Trading to ascertain what priority consumers looked for when using a Taxi or Private Hire Company, the results may well surprise you, I list the top six in order of priority: -

1. 93.7%   Safety of the Vehicle
2. 91.6%   Drivers Knowledge of the area
3. 89.7%   Cleanliness of the vehicle
4. 88.5%   Convenience of the service
5. 86.0%   Waiting time for the vehicle to arrive
6. 85.4%   Price

Safety of Vehicle

All Private Hire and Taxi vehicles require a vehicle test either annually or every six months. Most Dispatch Systems have a vehicle page with a facility to enter expiry dates for all documents. This should be kept up to date every time you get a copy of the new test. This is generally a requirement for your Operator's License issued by licensing council or Tfl. You can set most Systems to check the Expiry of all Documents and Licenses when the Driver logs on to work, and should any document or license have expired then it will not allow the Driver to work until he has produced the required document. You can also set most Systems to remind the driver of any documents or licenses due to expire either on the PDA or the Driver Statement

This is the legal requirement however I believe that a Driver should do a daily "walk round" check of his vehicle before he logs on to work. This would cover items such as tyre's, fluid levels and windscreen. It is also advisable for you to check the vehicle every month and detail a checklist, things like tyres, interior and exterior condition, whether the luggage space has loads of junk in. How you see the vehicle is how your Customers see it so it is vital to ensure that

the standards that you set are being adhered to.

Drivers Knowledge of the Area

Most Councils and the Tfl require some form of knowledge or topographical test, but is this enough for your locality? Most Dispatch systems have some form of navigation available from within the program enabling the driver to activate this feature to not only get him to the pick up address, but once a passenger is on board it will guide him to his destination.

When interviewing a driver it is prudent to ask questions about your local area to ensure he has a rudimentary local knowledge at least, and is also confident in his ability to transport his passengers without having to ask them for directions.

Cleanliness of the Vehicle

It should go without saying that a driver keeps his vehicle clean, inside and out, this does need to be checked and documented though so that you can spot any trends.

Dependent on the kind of work that you carry out it may be worth setting up a grading system from within your system and specify what work different grades of vehicle can do. This will have the effect of motivating drivers to ensure their vehicles are always clean and tidy.

Convenience of the Service

It should be easy for your customer's to book with you, the phone should be answered promptly and courteously. The phone shouldn't be left to ring, this gives a really bad impression to the customer and could result in them calling one of your competitors. It is better to answer the phone briefly and explain that you are busy and will take their call shortly, then put the customer on hold.

When taking the booking ensure your telephonists take the bookings with the minimum of fuss, ensuring the booking is taken quickly but accurately.

With a telephone system connected to your Dispatch System as soon as the call is answered a screen pops up with the regular journeys stored against that phone number, along with the customer's name, which also adds a personal touch to the call, and makes the customer feel important.

A high percentage of customers now ask for a price for the journey, setting your pricing matrix correctly within your taxi booking software will allow your telephonists to quote accurately and consistently. The number of control rooms I have been in where the telephonists ask the controller a price every time they need to quote. This is timewasting and keeps the telephonists on that same call instead of answering another call.

Waiting Time

This item refers to the amount of time taken from making the booking to the vehicle arriving at the pick-up address.

The first thing to ensure is that the job is despatched straight away for an immediate booking and at the "Despatch Time" for pre booked work. The easiest and most efficient way to do this is to use auto despatch within your taxi booking software; as long as your settings for this are correct for your company then this will operate efficiently.

Most Taxi Booking Systems will provide a report for Late Jobs, this report details the percentage of jobs despatched on time and then in 5-minute increments so that you can see how you are performing, especially at peak times.

You also need to look at whether the driver has actually started driving to the pick up when they were given the job. Too many times you see driver's finishing their coffee, a page in their book or even a conversation before they set off for the pick up. Why not arrive early there is always a chance that the passenger is ready early. If a driver does 12 jobs in a shift and they all came out 5 minutes early then that is an hour they have gained to do other jobs, thereby increasing his takings.

Ensure that you have enough drivers working during your peek periods, so that your service doesn't suffer just because you are busy. If you have to go on a delay then be realistic, don't tell someone their car will be there in 10 minutes if you know it will be 20 minutes. All that will happen is that the customer will be back on the phone asking where their car is, tying up a telephonist who could be taking a booking. The customer also thinks that they have been lied to, not a good impression to make.

Price

You will no doubt have gathered that Customers don't necessarily go for the cheapest option when booking a vehicle. I believe that a customer will pay a bit more to get the service and safety that they require. Be realistic when setting your fares, use the pricing matrix in your System to accurately price each job. Use a mixture of fixed fares and mileage rates to achieve this.

If your fares are higher than your competitors because you give a very good customer service, then you will attract more drivers to your company and you will be in a position to select the drivers that you want.

Other Driver Management Functions

If you charge a circuit fee, don't fall into the trap of taking on drivers for the sake of it, if you have too many drivers then their earnings will be diluted and

you will find drivers leaving, usually your better drivers.

Plan to have 15% more drivers than you need in total, as there are always drivers off for one reason or another. Perhaps look at charging a part time circuit fee so that you have additional capacity for the busy periods, typically a Friday and Saturday night, include a Sunday night as well if you regularly struggle on that night.

Within most Dispatch Systems you can set individual Driver Shift times on a daily basis so your drivers don't suddenly switch shifts without your knowledge.

Most Dispatch Systems provide a report that will detail the hours a driver has worked, coupling this with his earnings will give you an average hourly rate. Drivers with a low hourly rate tend to be working when the circuit is quiet, conversely a higher hourly rate shows that the driver is working during peak periods.

Finally, if you manage your drivers well and let them know your expectations, your Company will grow as the level of Customer Service will keep increasing, thereby creating more work as your customers will do some of your marketing for you, by word of mouth, which is the best form of advertising you can get.