5 questions to answer when looking for an ELD provider

The electronic logging device (ELD) mandate is more than a year away but you should be thinking about choosing a technology partner now. Bruce Wilson, Chief Technical Officer for EROAD, provides some tips on how to pick the right one.

The ELD mandate means that from December 2017 commercial vehicles will require an electronic device to be connected to their engine. It's anticipated that there will be dozens of products out there, but which one is best for your needs? To help make your search easier, here are my top five things you need to consider when looking for an ELD technology partner.

1. Is your ELD accurate and reliable?

You need to be able to trust, come audit time, that you've captured everything required to comply with the ELD mandate, and that you've not been left high and dry by your technology. An unreliable device or system will waste your time and put you at risk during an audit. Closely related to accuracy is up-time. In other words, how many minutes each month can you expect the service to be working – or not working?

These are the basics and they speak to the quality of your product. Everyone says their ELD is accurate and reliable, but how can you trust it to be true? A good place to start is finding out whether a company makes that information public. If it does then it's got nothing to hide. If it doesn't, it still may have nothing to hide, but you won't know that for sure. So check that the operator is transparent about uptime and accuracy. An ELD provider that's open about those things is making a statement about its confidence in its product.

A final way to determine accuracy and reliability is if the product is independently certified. The ELD mandate doesn't require this of technology providers, and many companies are choosing to self-certify. You wouldn't expect truck manufacturers to certify their own vehicles' roadworthiness so why would you accept it from your technology partner?

And be sure to find out whether your tech supplier has a helpdesk and what hours it's staffed – it's good to know that someone will pick up the phone if needed. To be sure, you could ask what their phone answering statistics are.

2. Is your ELD future proofed?

The technology you install in a truck should last at least as long as the vehicle itself. The tech world moves incredibly quickly, so ask if the company you're considering uses the latest technology. Legacy systems that haven't kept up with tech trends can slow them – and you – down.

Find out how often a company releases software updates. Companies that update regularly – perhaps as often as every month – show that their technology platform is built for future needs, and that they respond to customer pain points. And do they provide over-the-air software upgrades free as part of the service, or are they an additional cost?

It's worth finding out how much a company spends on research and development, too. The only technology companies that thrive are those that constantly innovate, so any company worth its salt will be happy to share what it spends on R&D. If the company is publicly listed, that information will be freely available anyway.

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3. Is your data safe?

There are a couple of things to consider here. First and foremost, is the system you're using secure? No system is 100 percent hack-proof, but you should expect bank-grade levels of security. A good tech company will ask independent security specialists – often former hackers – to evaluate its system (ie, try to break in) at least once a year. There are US and international standards for technology security, so ask your prospective provider whether their product conforms to standards such as FIPS 140-2 and Common Criteria.

Secondly, you need to ask who owns the information that's being collected. If the answer is anything other than, "You do," walk away. Quickly. It could be that a company provides a cheaper ELD service because it's making up the shortfall by selling your data to a third party. If that's the case, the very least you can expect is a lot more junk mail arriving to your inbox. At worst, a competitor could get its hands on your business-sensitive information. Establish at the beginning that the data is yours, and the technology provider is simply looking after it on your behalf.

4. Does your technology contribute to driver safety?

Every ELD will be required to log how long a driver is behind the wheel (known as Hours of Service, or HOS), but some systems can monitor driving events such as speed limit violations, sharp cornering and harsh braking. This isn't just about preventing your drivers from getting a ticket, it's also about keeping them safe in their workplace – the open road.

Driver behavior is just one side of safety, so consider a product that helps automate vehicle inspections too. If drivers have a digital checklist, they can easily share results with the depot where you, or your engineers and mechanics, can access them quickly.

5. What else is your technology doing for you?

By December 2017 any number of products will be able to do the very basics to ensure you're compliant, but is your product adding value to your business? Yep, the ELD mandate, if you're smart about it, can actually save you money.

A basic ELD will help ensure you don't rack up fines for breaching HOS rules. And for IFTA and weight-mile taxation purposes ELDs will – or should – accurately tell you how far a vehicle has travelled. However, some will also calculate tax-exempt mileage on private roads, which can add up to plenty if your trucks are used in the logging, construction, or rural industries.

The very best systems do much more than simply audit how far a vehicle has travelled. We've already mentioned that a good system can contribute to driver safety, but there are other benefits to knowing how your trucks are being driven. The more insight you have, the better chance you have of keeping vehicles on the road for as long as possible. No one's truck is making money while it's in the workshop, and smoother driving equals lower maintenance costs, and maybe cheaper insurance premiums too.

The bottom line is, if you've got the right product, compliance doesn't have to be a financial burden.