

A man wearing a black beanie and a red puffer jacket is sitting in the driver's seat of a vehicle. He is pointing with his right index finger at a tablet computer held by another person. The tablet displays a map or navigation interface. The background shows the interior of the vehicle, including the ceiling and a rearview mirror.

CASE STUDY

Merchants Foodservice +  SCLERA | Omnitracs
Fleet Solutions

Applying advanced technologies to ensure drivers and products arrive safely, on time, and intact



About the Company

From humble roots more than 110 years ago in southern Mississippi, Merchants Foodservice has grown into the 12th-largest foodservice distributor in the United States with operations in 12 states. More than 6,000 customers trust Merchants Foodservice and its hardworking team of 800 individuals to meet their needs by delivering perishable and non-perishable goods in a timely and safe manner. The company works proactively and aggressively to protect the safety of its products, drivers, and the general public. To achieve this goal, Merchants closely monitors every link in the supply chain, from the grower and manufacturer through delivery to its customers.

The Challenge

From morning to night (and night to morning), fleets use technology to monitor their vehicles, their drivers and their operations. But how do they ensure they control the technology to run a safer, more efficient business – rather than the technology controlling them?

Merchants Foodservice faces some of the toughest challenges throughout the day – every day



As a result of these challenges, Merchants turned to both Omnitracs and SmartDrive individually. Now that both companies are one, Merchants can take advantage of the converged solution of Omnitracs One to meet its challenges and its customers’ needs.



The Solution

Video Safety

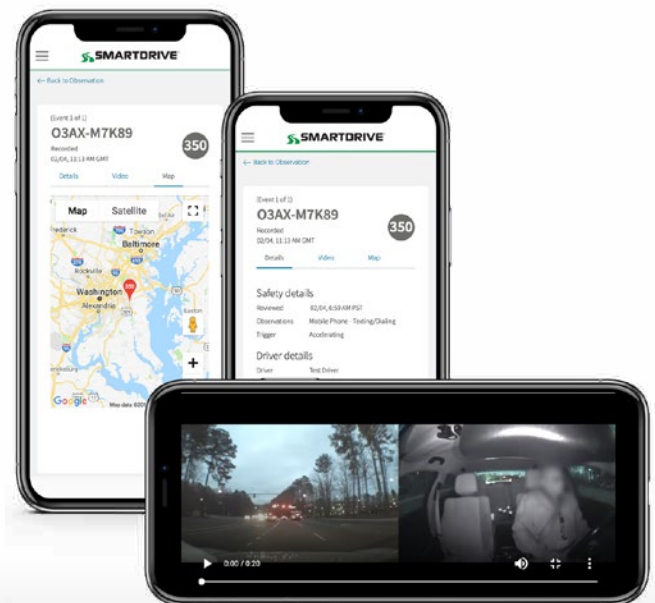
“You don’t know what’s going on once outside of your facility,” commented William Dowden, Safety Manager, Merchants Foodservice. “We use technology to see exactly what our drivers are doing – not to spy on them – but to be sure they’re following safety protocols to protect themselves and our fleet.”

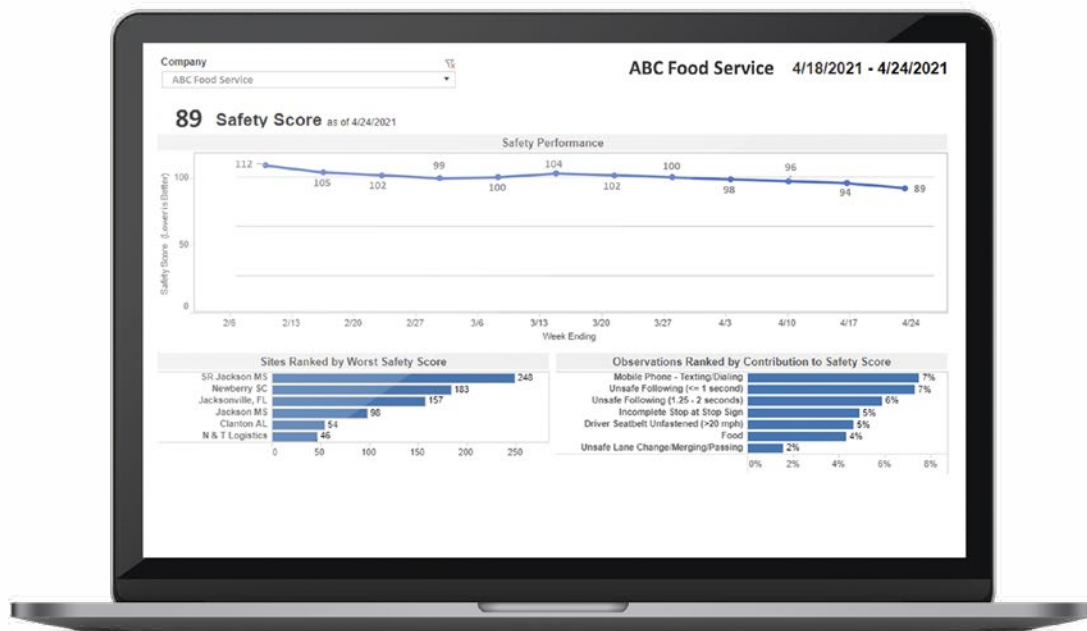
Like many fleet safety managers today, Dowden considers video-based safety as a “must have” element in Merchants’ comprehensive approach to safety, adding, “You’re playing Russian Roulette if you don’t have cameras in your truck.” That’s why Merchants uses the [SmartDrive video-based safety program](#) to:

- Help drivers see what they can’t see and better understand what other drivers are doing
- Deliver the necessary information to coach drivers on unsafe habits or to provide kudos on a job well done
- Provide video for safety meetings to encourage discussion and remind drivers of good safety habits

The intuitive dashboard that supports Merchants’ SmartDrive video safety program provides a good play-by-play insight into what’s occurring in each vehicle, along with engine and vehicle data. There’s no more guessing as to what took place when an incident occurred as Dowden explains, “When we observe an event, like running a red light, we now know if our driver was distracted and was unable to apply brakes in time, or did he push on the accelerometer to run the red light to avoid stopping? This is the kind of insight that informs a good coaching session and lets us know what the driver was thinking at the time action was taken.”

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Supporting this activity is the ability to deliver safety performance insights, including email notifications for speeding, hard braking, hard acceleration, and idle times. This provides Merchants with the ability to help drivers – in real time.

The weekly *SmartDrive Safety Performance Executive Performance Summary* provides Merchants with an overall safety assessment, along with detailed information on each site, so the company knows what’s driving its safety scores and where to focus its efforts. The scores are completely customizable to Merchants’ fleet. Plus, managers can assign higher scores to those observations that are requiring additional focus, so they can be in control of each individual KPI.

The program also provides coaching information to the company’s supervisors – ensuring coaching takes place in a timely manner. They know the number of average days between when an event was queued for coaching and when coaching took place. It’s important to coach when the event is fresh in the driver’s mind. Dowden commented, “We want 85% of our events to be coached in a timely manner. Now that we’ve reached that goal, we are now aiming for 90% since coaching is so important to making sure our drivers are doing better.”

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Compliance, Dispatch, and Routing

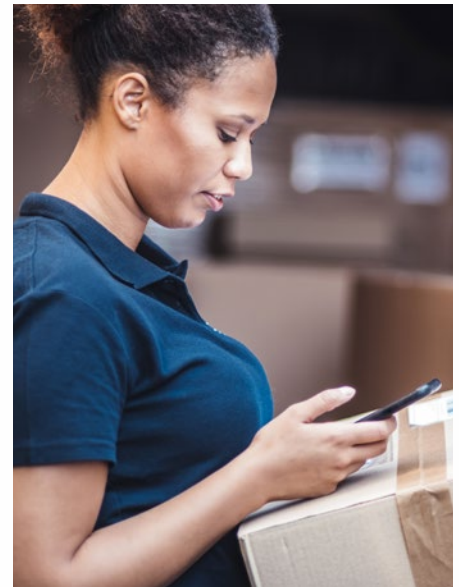
Compliance is a Department of Transportation (DOT) issue; it's not an option. "If we don't comply, we lose our DOT authority and if we lose our DOT authority, we can't deliver," commented Dowden.

Omnitracs offers a flexible **Electronic Logging Device (ELD)** that provides telematics functionality so Merchants' drivers remain in compliance. With real-time alerts, the intuitive display helps the fleet identify who is running out of time, where they are with their Hours of Service (HOS), and how much time they have left – all in one location. The fleet can easily find and view the day's log for each driver, which is graphically represented like paper logs. This allows for real-time knowledge, along with the ability to capture historical information. With this information, the transportation department can plan ahead and be proactive, so HOS issues don't turn into HOS violations.

Adding to visibility is **Omnitracs Dispatching**, which provides location information, vehicle speed, last call-in, and route detail information, so Merchants can see all their trucks and where they're at – any time of the day or night. "This is helpful when a driver calls in about an unsafe driver or a concern," Dowden stated, "We can drill down to the location to see if we have a truck in the area, identify the truck, and see if there's an issue or remind the driver to drive safely." Additional insight includes when the last delivery occurred, length of delivery, and whether projected deliveries and time windows promised to customers could be met. This additional visibility to routes is extremely helpful to Merchants' customer service department, so they can provide the service the company is known for delivering. The level of improvement to Merchants' dispatching operations since upgrading to Omnitracs One has resulted in a 11-15% increase in both driver visibility and customer satisfaction.

Merchants appreciates Omnitracs' easy-to-use mobile app, which allows drivers to change duty status and perform Driver Vehicle Inspection Reports (DVIRs). They're able to tell what their times are, can switch back and forth from HOS to routing, and send messages directly from the app. With DVIR, drivers can identify a defect, send a message directly to maintenance, and receive a confirmation with repair status. "This closes the loop that DOT requires," stated Dowden.

The pairing of compliance and dispatch powerfully impacts a fleet. Dispatchers get real-time feedback to understand if what's actually happening is what they wanted to happen. With this information, adjustments can be made to ensure teams are meeting every client's schedule and needs.



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Another impact on business is routing, which is why it's important that Merchants designs routes that are profitable and make good business sense. **Omnitracs Routing** provides flexibility by making route adjustments based upon the driver or changes in the route (number of deliveries, driver tenure, etc.). This flexibility extends to customer needs, i.e., if a restaurant or school has set delivery windows based upon business needs. Having this information allows Omnitracs' routers to schedule stops based upon each customer's needs – eliminating lost service times and windows – while ensuring route profitability. In addition, dispatchers know if the driver made any unplanned stops or did not follow the route as planned. With everything in one place, Merchants' dispatchers know – in real time – if a driver is running behind schedule (or ahead), so they make route changes and hit promised service windows.

In addition, **Omnitracs Active Alert** helps the back office keep customers informed of their deliveries and make adjustments as needed. "I can't begin to tell you how much our customer service has improved since implementing Omnitracs," commented Dowden. Prior to Omnitracs, Merchants would field calls asking about deliveries – where's my truck, when is it arriving, etc. Now, with proactive alerts, Merchants can send customers text messages or emails alerting them to their truck's location and estimated delivery time. And, if the delivery time changes, an update is sent out. Customers can also track when a delivery has been made. "The number of calls we receive has dropped tremendously," observed Dowden. "Most importantly, it allows our customer service team to concentrate on matters more important than delivery times."

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The Results

The result of its efforts has paid off for Merchants:

- Reduced cell phone distractions by 50%
- Reduced speeding by 75%
- Reduced close following by 30%
- Reduced collision frequency by 50%
- Reduced Crash Score and DOT BASIC to 3 – the lowest it's been in years

In addition to the safety benefits of video, Merchants also experienced significant cost savings. As soon as drivers learned that their aggressive driving (hard braking, fast acceleration, sudden stops, swerving, etc.) triggered the camera, they began to drive smoother. As a result, Merchants began to see an increase in its MPG – from 6.4 MPG 18 months ago to 7.5 today. Dowden is thrilled by the results. “A 14% fuel efficiency improvement is a huge cost saving for us. In addition to not wasting a lot of gas, we’re not tearing up our trucks by using up the brakes.”

On top of fuel and maintenance savings, Merchants reduced its insurance claims by 25%. In addition, it's had zero claims that have exceeded its deductible in the last three years. “Video evidence has been instrumental in either exonerating our drivers when they're not at fault or helping our insurance company quickly negotiate when they are,” commented Dowden. “Instead of insurance companies looking at us as a high-risk fleet, they're now looking at us as a good business investment. Now we have insurance companies coming to us and wanting our business!”

“

We've seen tangible results with the convergence of SmartDrive and Omnitracs.”

William Dowden
Safety Manager,
Merchants Foodservice



14%

fuel efficiency improvement



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Since using Omnitrac's, DVIR scores for vehicle maintenance have decreased about 25% – something Merchants is looking to reduce even further as it continues to focus on vehicle maintenance. “We don’t want our drivers sitting on the side of the road being out of service,” commented Dowden. “By noting these defects in a timely manner, our shop can fix them so we’re not missing service windows and delivery times.”

Drivers are a fleet’s most valuable asset. Unfortunately, retaining drivers is a challenge for most fleets. Merchants finds that a video-based safety program with an intuitive coaching program is invaluable in opening the lines of communication with its drivers and retaining them. And, once Merchants coaches a driver to excellence, they don’t want to lose them.

Good drivers like coaching because they want to be better. Merchants drivers not only accepted cameras in their cabs, but most drivers wanted them. They wanted them for the added protection the video provides should an incident occur. They also appreciated the ease of use of both SmartDrive and Omnitrac's solutions. With technology in place, Merchants was able to increase its driver retention rate and attract new drivers looking for a fleet that has their backs.



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Conclusion

When Merchants looks at the challenges it faced, it knew that Omnitrac's and SmartDrive addressed those challenges head-on, enabling a safer, more efficient operation. "We've been a customer of both companies for several years. We love the technologies and we love the companies. We're excited to see these two great companies come together as one, along with the exciting innovations that will evolve to make us a safer, better company in the future."

FEATURED TECHNOLOGY



SmartDrive
Video-based Safety



Omnitrac's ELD
and HOS Solutions



Omnitrac's
Routing



Omnitrac's
Dispatching



Omnitrac's
XRS



Omnitrac's
Active Alert

ABOUT OMNITRACS

Omnitracs, LLC is a global pioneer of trucking solutions for all business models. Omnitracs' more than 1,000 employees deliver software-as-a-service-based solutions to help over 14,000 customers manage nearly 1,100,000 assets in more than 70 countries. The company pioneered the use of commercial vehicle telematics 30 years ago and serves today as a powerhouse of innovative, intuitive technologies. Omnitracs transforms the transportation industry through technology and insight, featuring best-in-class solutions for compliance, safety and security, productivity, telematics and tracking, transportation management (TMS), planning and delivery, data and analytics, and professional services.

For more information visit omnitracs.com