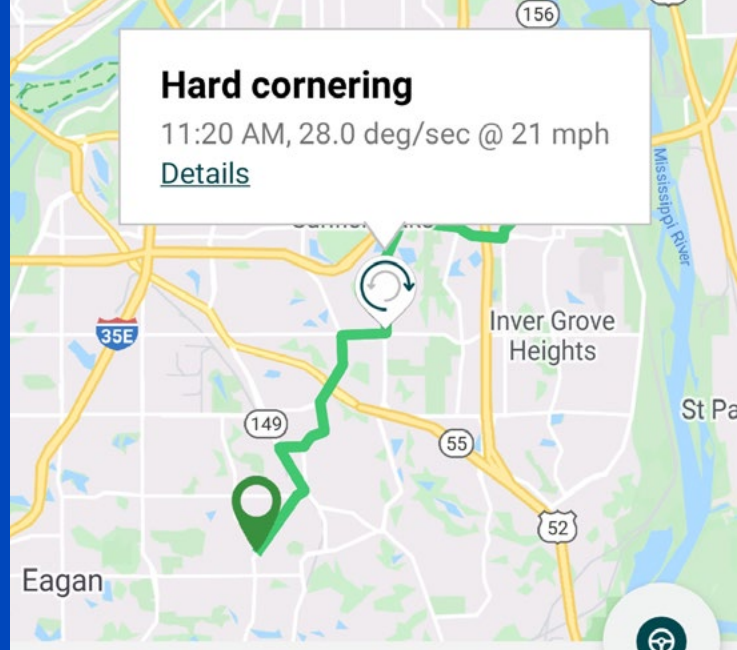




LOSS CONTROL SERVICES

Driver safety: Telematics-related smartphone apps



Telematics systems have rapidly evolved over the past 5 years to become an effective tool for identifying unsafe driving behavior. The ability to monitor speeding, hard braking, harsh accelerating and hard cornering provides insight into a driver's behavior. Most systems provide a score for each of these unsafe events as well as an overall safe driving score. Scoring enables a supervisor to quickly identify drivers who need coaching.

Accident frequency and severity typically improve if organizations manage this data effectively. To enhance this process, telematics vendors have added associated driver smartphone apps. The apps generally provide the same information directly to the driver, keeping them informed of their own driving behavior.

Providing drivers with immediate post-trip feedback can assist them in future drives.

Smartphone apps — changing driver behavior

These smartphone apps typically:

- Provide the driver with their overall safe driving score as well as subscores for speeding, hard braking, etc.
- Provide a safety score for each trip
- Allow the driver to view their entire trip, with indications where any unsafe events occurred
- Provide scores of other drivers on a team, letting a driver know where they rank compared with peers
- Offer a distracted driving component

Drivers can view their own performance and improve instead of waiting for a manager to bring it to their attention. Often, they identify spots along frequent routes where they consistently get the same alert, such as going too fast into a specific curve, and adjust going forward — positively changing driver behavior.

Gamification and rewards

In telematics, gamification refers to scoring, trending and competitive features of the app. Drivers can use information from the app to tweak their performance, ultimately resulting in improved driving behavior.

As with any game, the objective is to get better scores and perform better than your competitors: other drivers on your team. Sound enticing mainly for younger drivers who have grown up gaming? Not so; older drivers often feel they are better drivers and take seriously the need to improve their scores when other drivers on their team are performing better. Gamification quickly results in behavior modification due to the challenge, peer pressure or pride — all without management intervention.

Reward features are also becoming popular in telematic driver apps. Funded by the organization, small gift certificate rewards can be given to drivers automatically when they achieve certain safe driving levels. Or managers can choose to assign rewards on a case-by-case basis when appropriate, such as when a driver significantly improves their score. Reward denominations are often minimal, such as \$2 to \$5, and are issued in the form of a gift certificate to an establishment selected by the driver from their app, such as a coffee shop or restaurant.

Distracted driving

Many telematics systems provide a distracted driving feature which functions through a smartphone app. Depending on the system, features include:

- Restricting use of the phone while the vehicle is moving (calls, texting, swiping, etc.)
- Allowing only hands-free use or allowing calls only from/to specific approved numbers
- No restrictions, but full tracking/monitoring of phone use with scoring and alerts



Many telematics apps have a distracted driving feature that prohibits or monitors phone use.

Answers to frequently asked questions

- Telematics apps function only when in an organization vehicle, and are typically activated when a Bluetooth connection is made to a tag, dongle or other device in the vehicle
- Telematics safety-related apps take very little data; Nationwide's Vantage 360[®] telematics app, for example, uses approximately 500 kilobytes of data per hour of driving
 - That's less than 1% of the data that is used when browsing Facebook or using Snapchat for an hour¹
 - Extreme use, such as driving 8 hours straight for 30 days, would use 1.2% of a 10-gigabyte cellphone data plan

While data usage is minimal and unlimited data plans are common for employees, organizations need to research state laws where they operate to determine whether they need to reimburse their drivers for data utilized by the app. Some states are silent on the issue, and some may require some reimbursement.

Is offering a company cellphone a better solution?

Some organizations decide to provide a smartphone to drivers for other business reasons as well as the ability to control the phone. Organizations need to remember that a driver could still use their personal phone while driving and should have strong policies restricting such use.



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¹ "How Much Mobile Data Do I Need?" Lauren Hannula, whistleout.com/CellPhones/Guides/Mobile-Data-Usage-Guide (May 24, 2022).

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