

Wake Electric

Improves operations by implementing GPS Insight advanced tracking and dash cam solutions

GPSINSIGHT





Company Profile



Company:

Wake Electric

Industry:

Utility

Location:

North Carolina

Website:

wemc.com

Company

Wake Electric, an electric cooperative located northeast of Raleigh, North Carolina, is serving approximately 53,000 meters in a suburban area. They have 48 vehicles equipped with GPS Insight.

Challenge

With the region experiencing rapid growth and increased traffic, Wake Electric recognized the need to enhance driver safety, mitigate risks, and improve the overall effectiveness of their operations.

Solution

Wake Electric improved its operations by implementing the GPS Insight advanced vehicle tracking and dash cam solutions.

Before using GPS Insight, Wake Electric utilized a system from another provider. Four years ago, they switched to GPS Insight due to its superior integration capabilities with mapping systems. By incorporating GPS tracking data into their existing maps, Wake Electric gained a comprehensive view of their vehicle routes, power lines, and key assets, which significantly improved their operational efficiency.

“GPS Insight has a brilliant system for finding, tracking, and tracing truck routes,” said Don Bowman, Vice President of Engineering and Operations at Wake Electric.

When it came to dash cameras, they had to make another decision. Did they want dash cams that recorded both outside and inside a vehicle?

“That’s a huge cultural change and challenge...because of course, the first idea is that they’re just sitting in the office watching us work

and so we had to overcome that by talking about the challenges we have in our area,” he said.

To overcome these reservations, Wake Electric emphasized the importance of protecting their drivers in a crowded and distracted environment, ensuring accountability for safety policies, and improving driving skills collectively.

“We are in an area that is at a fast-growing pace,” Bowman said. “Our utility is currently working with 90 different subdivisions, and when you add that type of growth into an area...suddenly our drivers are just in a much more crowded area than they’re used to working.”

Benefits

Accountability

Not only did the roads and population change, but behaviors have also changed.

“We are originally a rural electric cooperative, and we’re used to doing farm roads and small town roads, and now suddenly we’re surrounded by traffic,” he said. “I just think that the population is becoming more crowded and more distracted at the same time. And I thought it was very important for us to start recording the activities and making sure we were protecting our drivers in those situations. And at the same time, giving us a scorecard on our drivers to make sure that we were improving our skills.”

In their area, one of the first questions the police ask after an accident is if someone had a dash cam.



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—Don Bowman
Vice President of
Engineering and Operations,
Wake Electric

"Because that settles all discrepancies of who...it's very easy, I believe, for the general public to always point to that big truck...and we just want to make sure we were in our lane and we weren't distracted," Bowman said. "It at least gives us an accountability to ourselves that we were doing the right thing."

Wake Electric has also made certain that drivers know the dash cameras are for coaching them to be safer, not as a punishment.

"The beauty of this system is that there are audible alerts that happen based on analytics of the drivers themselves," he said. "So if one of my drivers breaks policy and uses a cell phone at their ear, then it gives them an audible alarm of a distracted driving. They have a short amount of time – maybe 30 seconds – to put that that down and go back to normal."

With this feature, drivers are able to correct themselves and drive in a safer manner.

"We think that audible alarm very possibly protects our driver from being distracted longer than they need to be," he said.

Team players

Wake Electric also combines the information so they can see the overall picture of driving behavior, instead of calling out each driver individually.

"If our dashboard every day says that a large quantity of the alerts come from not wearing your seatbelt, then I can aggregate that into an incentive to say, if we can get that number of alerts based on seat belts down to zero at the end of this week, there's a pizza party, or there's a bonus, or there's a reason to do this," he said. "And at the same time, we are being safer."

By doing it this way, drivers aren't just doing it for themselves, they're doing it for the team.

"We're accountable to the safety policies we've put in place, and we've made everybody accountable to each other if we group them together," he said. "So it's been very important not to really focus on individuals at the beginning, but to introduce it in a way that it aggregates everybody's alerts at the same time to bring aware of what the problems really are."



Wake Electric also gives drivers the data so they can improve on their own.

“Now that we’ve gotten everybody comfortable with the fact that we are aggregating the data, we can now give the driver their own personal score,” he said. “This is not for management to study. This is for them to, at the end of every drive, look at their phone and see what it tells them about how good of driving behavior they had.”

Giving the drivers their own scores and the ability to see the team’s score has had even more of a positive effect.

“It almost becomes a self-accountability to say, I want to get that score higher. And while it doesn’t tell who the rankings are, at the end of every day, it tells you where you rank in safety. And it’s amazing how this suddenly became a gamification of safety – that I want to be the number one, I want to be the best driver, I want to be the safest driver. If you tell a crew of utility workers about safety, that’s one thing. But when you get them believing it, they want to be the best, and put in a friendly competition to it – that gamification just improves everybody’s driving. It has been great.”

Protection

With their 48 vehicles, primarily line trucks and service trucks in their fleet, they have given themselves an extra layer of safety.

“Giving ourselves that extra safety device really makes a difference in our work,” he said. “We have had instances where we had someone ...bump into our truck, and I think it would’ve been really easy for the other driver who to say, hey, they backed into me. But...we have it very, very, very distinctly on camera that we were at a complete standstill. We got bumped.”

However, even though drivers are protected, they’re not being micromanaged.

“What I think is also very exciting is that it’s not constantly recording and sending video back to management,” he said. “We don’t have time as management to watch video all day long, and that’s not what we’re using it for. But if there is an incident such as someone running a red light or running a stop sign...we have the ability to hit a button to record 30 seconds to 60 seconds of video and send that back to the management team to say, look what we are up against here. You might want to look at this video.”



The drivers have also used the dash cams to provide proof for what happened while they were driving.

They went from, we don't like that you're watching us to – did you see that video I sent you?" he said. "And, can you believe that happened? So they're appreciative of the technology, which exceeds our expectations on what to expect when you put cameras on utility workers."

Savings

Wake Electric is hoping that their insurance providers will start providing incentives for using dash cams, but they have already seen other cost savings.

"The AVL features alone have justified the economics of the technology... it just improves reliability, and our business is based on reliability," he said. "How quickly can we get to a power outage location? Well, if our dispatchers know exactly now where the outage is occurring and know where the closest truck is, it's just a better coordinated effort. There are inherent benefits and savings there."

They also anticipate savings from increased safety.

Bowman recommends GPS Insight to other utility companies.

"Utilities around the country really need to be held accountable for the actions that they do out in the system...this is dangerous work," Bowman said. "And it's actually very important work. It's critical to

We do expect that becoming better drivers is ultimately going to pay for itself over and over again...Just the one car accident or one issue out on the road could very well take care of any payments that we would make for these services – and protect our employees and our company at the same time.

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the infrastructure of our country. So, the safer we could be, the more efficient we can be. I think utilities would benefit from that.”

Taking the lead

There are 26 electric cooperatives in North Carolina, and Wake Electric was the first to put dash cams in their trucks. When they showed their statewide safety coordinator, he asked them to present at a safety summit.

“There are a lot of people suddenly paying attention to this now that we’ve deployed it,” he said. “Nobody wanted to be the first, but, now that we’ve done it and we don’t have horror stories from it, they’re ready to hear about it.”

Wake Electric is glad they implemented GPS Insight, and the look forward to seeing even more benefits.

“The drivers are doing the right things, and they’re improving each and every day,” he said. “Because, like I said, the roads are getting more crowded and people are becoming more distracted. We need to make sure we are doing the right thing, and this system helps us keep accountability on that.”

To summarize, the benefits include:

Integration with mapping systems: GPS Insight allows integration with other mapping systems, providing the ability to use the AVL system on the same maps as the lines and assets of the system.

Enhanced driver safety: With the introduction of dash cams, drivers can record activities outside the truck and forward-facing views, ensuring their safety and protecting them in situations like crowded areas and increased traffic.

Improved driver behavior: The system provides audible alerts based on driver analytics, alerting them to distracted driving behaviors such as using a cell phone while driving. This encourages drivers to correct their behavior and promotes safer driving practices.

Collective accountability and awareness: By aggregating information and focusing on group alerts rather than individual reprimands, the system promotes a sense of collective accountability among drivers. It allows the identification of common safety issues and incentivizes improvements, fostering a safer work environment.



Highlights

- Improved driver safety
- Gamified driver accountability
- Increased effectiveness of utility operation

Individualized driver scorecards: The introduction of facial recognition technology allows drivers to access their own personal driving scores, encouraging self-accountability and a desire to improve driving behavior. It creates a friendly competition among drivers to be the safest and best performer.

Video evidence for incidents: The cameras provide video recordings in case of incidents such as accidents or traffic violations. This helps settle disputes and provides evidence for insurance claims or to showcase external factors affecting the driver's actions.

Increased reliability and resiliency: GPS and AVL systems help improve response times to power outages by providing accurate location information and coordinating efforts between dispatchers and trucks. This ensures a more efficient and effective response to outages.

Potential cost savings: The system may lead to cost savings through potential incentives and rebates from insurance providers for demonstrating improved driving behavior. Additionally, preventing accidents or liabilities can save significant costs for the company.

Enhanced accountability and liability protection: The breadcrumb trace of vehicle locations provided by the GPS system helps establish accountability and liability in situations where incidents occur. It allows the company to demonstrate its presence or absence at specific locations during critical times.

Efficient asset management: Integration with outage management systems allows for accurate mapping of assets, such as switches and breakers, and enables better coordination between computer systems and field vehicles in responding to outages and servicing assets.

Long-term implementation: The company has been using AVL systems for approximately 10 years, switched to GPS Insight about four years ago, and recently added dash cams. The gradual implementation has resulted in positive acceptance from drivers and improved efficiency.

Product Links

- [GPS Tracking](#)
- [Smart Cameras](#)

About GPS Insight

GPS Insight helps fleet and field service businesses by delivering innovative solutions and actionable insights. Organizations across the globe turn to GPS Insight when they have high operating costs, are worried about safety on the roads, and struggle with fleet and field inefficiencies that waste valuable time and money. GPS Insight offers best-of-breed technology for organizations with drivers and technicians in the field, fleets of vehicles, trailers, and other mobile assets. GPS Insight provides many solutions that include vehicle and asset tracking, fleet management, AI-enabled smart cameras, field service management, and regulatory compliance solutions.

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