From fill-ups to financial control

How fleet card analytics drive smarter decisions

Fleet management is increasingly complex for managers contending with rising fuel costs, maintenance challenges and an ever-changing technological landscape. In this environment, fleet card data and analytics can provide the insights and efficiencies needed to optimize fleet operations.

Understanding the challenges

From cost control to data management, fleet managers must overcome a wide range of challenges to maintain operational efficiency. Controlling the total cost of ownership (TCO) is essential for fleets of all sizes. This includes optimizing fuel spend, maintenance, driver safety, and asset acquisition and termination. Among the most significant challenges are:

- **Data overload:** Many fleet managers have access to large volumes of unstructured data but often struggle to convert this information into actionable insights. This creates a need for automation tools that can aggregate and analyze large amounts of data.

  This deluge of information can make it difficult for managers to get a handle on actionable business insights. A report from Work Truck Online underscores that many fleet managers feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of data, with some expressing concerns that much of it is irrelevant to their daily operations.

  According to a CerebrumX Labs survey published in Automotive Fleet, half of respondents said they need a better way to standardize data

from disparate systems or original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) to improve the process of leveraging their connected vehicle data.

- **Fuel cost control:** Managing fuel expenses remains a top priority for fleet managers. There are many opportunities for fleet managers to leverage their investment in card programs and management software to save on fuel costs, including:

  › **Limit transactions to specific fuel types and merchants.**
  › **Leverage mobile tools to route drivers to the most cost-effective location.**
  › **Take advantage of pre-negotiated discounts at point of sale.**

Frost & Sullivan found that companies using fleet management software saw an average return on investment (ROI) of 300%.

ABI Research noted that leveraging route optimization tools can help reduce fuel consumption by upwards of 10% to 15%. Route optimization not only reduces fuel costs but also significantly boosts driver productivity, leading us to the third challenge keeping fleet managers up at night.

- **Driver productivity:** Efficient operations hinge on minimizing downtime and refining driver behavior. Putting mobile tools in the hands of the drivers, coupled with monitoring tools, provide data-driven insights into driver habits and arms fleet managers with the information and tools they need to improve behavior and boost productivity.

- **Predictive maintenance:** Moving from reactive to predictive maintenance requires harnessing vehicle telemetry data to proactively identify potential issues. Preventative maintenance reduces downtime and can help to minimize the costs from unexpected repairs. Preventive fleet maintenance systems spot existing problems, while predictive analysis can identify problems before they appear.

  A study by McKinsey noted that predictive maintenance can reduce maintenance costs by up to 40%. Moreover, Deloitte reports that fleets implementing predictive maintenance experience a 20% reduction in unplanned downtime and a 25% increase in productivity.

Predictive maintenance ranked in first place in an Automotive Fleet report conducted on fleet management trends in 2024.

- **Technology integration:** The ability to integrate and leverage technology, including telematics, can provide fleet owners with vital information on vehicle usage, efficiencies and driver behavior. It can also help identify issues such as vehicle problems and fleet card abuse or misuse.

  While telematics and analytics tools offer immense potential, fleet managers need user-friendly tools to effectively implement these management solutions.

  Frost & Sullivan found that companies using fleet management software saw an average return on investment (ROI) of 300%. This trend is projected to last as businesses see the real advantages of data-driven fleet management solutions.

Addressing fleet management pain points

Fleet card technology can be customized to meet operational challenges head-on. These cards enable fleet managers to make smarter decisions and achieve greater operational control by combining real-time transaction monitoring, data analytics and seamless integration capabilities. Customization offers far-reaching benefits by enabling fleet

managers to address their unique operational needs and business objectives.

The traditional dedicated card for fuel has evolved to enable "smart" fleet cards for managing the many non-fuel purchases required to meet the needs of today's fleets. A smart fleet card program maximizes your investment in telematics and fleet management software and comes with card-level controls, including product and merchant types, that affords fleets the flexibility to meet their specific needs.

Real-time transaction monitoring and fraud prevention

Real-time transaction monitoring empowers fleet managers to detect misuse and prevent fraudulent fleet card activity. For instance, integrating your fleet card with your telematics devices provides immediate visibility into fueling transactions, allowing anomalies to be promptly flagged. While this functionality can be useful, alert fatigue can diminish its value over time. The key is to customize alerts based on an analysis of trends rather than overwhelming users with isolated notifications.

Effective steps to address fleet card misuse require a multi-faceted approach that is proactive and reactive. In addition to setting transaction limits, fleets can leverage technology to limit use to authorized users. For example, card programs that leverage mobile apps can lock cards when not in use – while also using application programming interfaces (APIs) offers fleets the same controls in their downstream applications, such as their routing systems or mobile apps.

It is critical to note that not all fleet cards are the same. Providers who use artificial intelligence (AI) as part of the transaction authorization process can stem third-party fraud resulting from card skimming or card theft.

Fraud and misuse prevention is just one of the benefits of real-time monitoring. Ongoing data analysis also can reveal recurring issues – such as vehicle malfunctions or operating patterns – that impact fuel efficiency. Fleet managers can use these insights to address systemic problems, improve driver training and enhance operational integrity.

Automated reporting for enhanced efficiency

Automated reporting eliminates the need for manual data entry and reconciliation, significantly reducing administrative workloads for fleet management personnel. APIs integrated within fleet card platforms streamline processes such as driver setup, card issuance and transaction tracking. This automation minimizes errors and redundancies and can help to boost productivity.

Automation can facilitate seamless data sharing, reducing the possibility of human error and enhancing accuracy. These administrative efficiencies translate into tangible time savings and better resource allocation – freeing up fleet managers to focus on more strategic operational priorities.

Fleet card capabilities support a data-driven approach to fleet management. This facilitates business decisions that are informed by trends and metrics rather than assumptions. Visualizations within analytics tools can highlight patterns of premium fuel

Advanced data analytics for strategic decision-making

The power of data analytics extends far beyond transactional business insights. Fleet managers can use telemetry data and customized reporting tools to:

- Monitor fuel consumption per vehicle and cost per mile.
- Identify assets (vehicles) that are not efficient and could be replaced.
- Track idle time and assess its impact on fuel usage.
- Analyze driver behavior to promote fuel-efficient practices.
- Identify spending anomalies that signal potential misuse.
- Provide carbon emissions and merchant classification spend data.

usage when only regular fuel is needed. This enables fleet managers to work with drivers to optimize purchasing strategies and reduce costs.

Analytics tools provide deeper insights into operational challenges. This comprehensive visibility is a game-changer for strategic planning. It enables fleet managers to understand regional differences in spending, track seasonal trends and evaluate the success of business initiatives.

Detailed reporting in exportable formats helps to ensure that fleet managers can effectively communicate insights to drivers and other key stakeholders.

Quantifying the benefits

While precise metrics depend on individual fleet operating conditions, the qualitative benefits of fleet card technology include more controls such as geography, time and frequency of spend, product types and allowed merchants.

The benefit to the fleet is to achieve optimal fleet TCO:

- **Improved cost visibility:** Real-time insights provide a comprehensive view of expenses, facilitating better budgeting and control.
- **Enhanced fraud and misuse detection:** Advanced tools and trend analysis minimize financial losses due to fraudulent activity or misused cards.
- **Reduced administrative burden:** Automating routine tasks allows time for strategic initiatives.
- **Streamlined maintenance:** Predictive analytics reduce vehicle downtime by addressing issues before they escalate.

Quantifying the economic benefits of using fleet card analytics requires customer feedback and industry benchmarks, but anecdotal evidence demonstrates significant improvements in efficiency and cost savings. Fleet managers consistently report reduced manual workloads, faster decision-making, improved communication with drivers and more effective budgeting.

Companies operating a mixed fleet of traditional vehicles and electric vehicles (EVs) will benefit from

a fleet card that can be used for all vehicle types. As the fleet industry changes, fleet card reporting technologies are also evolving to accommodate industry shifts toward EVs. This includes tools like reports on carbon emissions and EV charging transactions – enabling fleet managers to make informed decisions about their fleets.

Differentiating features to consider

Not all fleet card programs provide the robust reporting, analytics, tools and integration required to address the growing challenges facing fleet managers. Important considerations when choosing a fleet card platform include:

Mixed fleet support

Companies operating a mixed fleet should look for a platform that offers the ability to manage all vehicle types with the same card.

Dual-rail functionality

A fleet card platform that combines closed-loop and open-loop capabilities will provide the flexibility for fleets to make purchases within a controlled network and beyond.

A closed-loop system uses real-time data and feedback to monitor, evaluate and adjust operations dynamically. Fleet cards that run on closed loop offer more detailed information (level III data) for more insightful reporting and greater controls (for example, product types).

By contrast, an open-loop system operates without feedback or real-time adjustments. Closed loop systems are more common among larger fleets with complex operations.

Regulatory compliance and security

It's important to choose a platform that complies with government and industry standards for data security and reliability. If technology is at the heart of reducing costs and improving efficiency, it's critical that the fleet card provider offers the highest levels of cyber security and uptime.

Comprehensive APIs

APIs provide robust integration with internal systems and processes enabling unparalleled automation and self-service capabilities. Fleet managers can drive every aspect of their program, including card control, transactions and driver information.

Customer service

Fleet card programs that include a focus on service excellence ensure that fleet managers receive the guidance they need to optimize their programs. It is important to implement a program that includes everything from consultative support to 24/7 assistance.

Single card solution for all vehicle types

If your fleet needs gas or diesel or access to convenience stores, private sites or truck stops, it's important to have a single card that can streamline your operations.

Looking ahead: the future of fleet management

The role of fleet card technology is expanding to address the new challenges and opportunities facing fleet managers. The integration of real-time data, predictive analytics and customizable reporting can help ensure that managers have the tools they need to adapt and thrive.

By embracing state-of-the art fleet card technology, fleet managers can reduce costs, improve efficiency and stay ahead of the competition. As new trends reshape the fleet landscape, the adaptability of fleet card platforms is essential for maintaining operational excellence.

→ *Learn how the Voyager Fleet Program can help keep your fleet moving forward.*

About U.S. Bank Voyager

Managing fleet expenses and payments can be a major challenge – especially without the right solutions. The U.S. Bank Voyager Fleet Program (Voyager) offers businesses a single-source solution to help manage and control fleet expenses. Voyager enhances driver efficiency and reduces costs while supporting data integrity and preventing fraud and misuse. Drivers, fleet managers and executives rely on Voyager to simplify life on the road and in the office. Furthermore, U.S. Bank is the only major financial institution to offer a fleet-related payment solution that runs on a reliable and proprietary network with the efficiency and security that only a bank can provide.

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