CASE STUDY

McColl's Transport

Toolbox Talks, Technology and Engaging a Remote Workforce: the McColl's Experience

Fleet: 200 prime movers, 650 tankers/trailers, 90 subcontractors
No. of Drivers: 350

Case Study:

New tricks: How technology and toolbox talks combine to drive safety for longstanding transport operator

Organisation: McColl's Transport
Staff: 450
Fleet: 200 prime movers, 650 tankers/trailers, 90 subcontractors

Key outcomes

- Safety is a journey but a sustained commitment and persistence will reap rewards in business performance and build a strong safety culture over time
- Technology-based solutions can be effective in improving safety performance while helping drivers complete daily tasks, simultaneously improving safety and efficiency of operations
- Toolbox talks remain a critical communication tool in sharing safety information with drivers and the wider workforce, particularly where drivers are remote and it is difficult to gather your workforce in one location
- Utilising technology solutions can make toolbox talks more engaging and accessible, driving higher attendance rates among drivers and helping organisations track and report attendance
- Toolbox talks can also be an effective consultation tool in introducing safety measures, allowing workers to have their say and management to outline the reasons for and benefits of a proposal
- Consultation and outlining the benefits to workers is critical in driving acceptance of new safety measures and overcoming resistance

"In fact, with the company marking 70 years of operation in 2022, leveraging technology solutions to help drivers has become a hallmark of the McColl's approach to business, and a key to its continued longevity."

Synopsis

Toolbox talks remain a critical information tool in the transport industry, particularly in improving safety performance. Utilising technology can make toolbox talks more engaging and accessible, helping to overcome the challenge of a workforce that is remote or spread across multiple locations.

Introduction

Engaging drivers with safety, particularly when you have a disparate and experienced workforce 'set in their ways', can be difficult.

Toolbox talks are an effective and critical way to share safety and other information with your workforce. But when most of your drivers are remote and you don't often see them, that creates further challenges.

For McColl's Transport, technology-based solutions have been the answer. Toolbox talks are now more engaging and easily accessible, consistently lifting attendance to almost 100 per cent. And a range of tech solutions across the business have improved safety, while making it easier for truck drivers to do their job.

The company's continual focus on improving safety has driven significant improvements over the past decade in particular, with reductions in incident rates and WorkCover costs, for example, flowing through to the bottom line.

It has also created a strong safety culture and acceptance that safety measures are introduced for the benefit of drivers, as well as the company and the general public.

In fact, with the company marking 70 years of operation in 2022, leveraging technology solutions to help drivers has become a hallmark of the McColl's approach to business, and a key to its continued longevity.

While McColl's approach to safety is comprehensive across the company, this case study will focus on technology solutions it has implemented in recent years and how they have improved safety performance. In particular, it explores how McColl's has made toolbox talks more engaging and accessible, and how its implementation strategy has driven buy-in and overcome resistance to safety measures, particularly among experienced drivers used to paper-based compliance.

About McColl's Transport

McColl's Transport was established in 1952 as a family-run operation with a single vehicle transporting milk around Geelong in Victoria.

Seven decades later, McColl's is Australia's largest independent carrier of dairy, food and consumer and industrial chemicals, operating in every mainland state and boasting a fleet of more than 200 prime movers and 650 tankers and trailers.

Refusing to compromise on safety, quality, compliance or maintenance, McColl's operations are driven by five core values: safety first; honesty and integrity; consistency; mutual respect; and commercial responsibility.

While McColl's is active in safety across the business, for the sake of brevity this case study will focus on the operations of its Bulk Food Division, and more specifically on technology-based safety solutions it has implemented.

McColl's Bulk Food Division operates Australia's largest fleet of modern, stainless steel tankers dedicated to transporting wine, beer, cider, fruit juices, chocolate, food oils, glucose, concentrates and a variety of other products.

It transports more than 30 food grade liquids to 160 sites across the country.

Toolbox Talks

Seeing the light

Like many transport businesses, McColl's uses the toolbox talk (TBT) as its primary method of communicating with its drivers. TBTs are critical in sharing information among its large and disparate workforce.

From a safety perspective, they allow the company to share information on incidents to prevent a repeat of the same behaviours that caused the incident. TBTs also mean a consistent message is being shared, and that same message is reaching all aspects of the business, including drivers, administration and management. Learnings can be from incidents within the business or wider events in the industry, with most TBTs devoting a third of the agenda to content directly related to safety.

Toolbox talks also play a critical role in consulting drivers and other workers on proposed safety measures, allowing the company to outline proposals and the motivation for them while providing an opportunity for those who will be impacted to raise any concerns or queries.

The challenge for McColl's was achieving high TBT attendance rates, when many of its drivers work remotely and even those regularly at a depot or at head office were usually off-site by the time most office-based administration and management staff began their working day.

The company had been completing TBTs individually. The monthly topic was emailed to drivers, who could access it via their company-supplied in-truck tablet and would then be called by their operations controller to discuss the content.

As McColl's continued further along the path of technology enabling safety, it went searching for a more efficient, less time consuming way to deliver TBTs, as well as a more robust method to record and track attendance.

Since mid-2020, McColl's has used the Lightspace Safety Management System to deliver TBTs in-person at headquarters, in depots, or via 'self-study' mode for drivers and others unable to attend in person.

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Lightspace has helped make in-person TBTs more engaging, in turn making the audience more likely to absorb the delivered messages, by allowing content to be cast to a television or projector and visual tools, such as videos or images, to be easily added to more effectively communicate content.

Once a TBT has been delivered, emails and SMS notifications are sent to all workers alerting them that a new TBT has been published. Self-study mode allows users unable to attend in person, in particular truck drivers, to access the content on their phone, tablet or computer.

During extended restrictions caused by the pandemic, managers also used Lightspace to record video messages for drivers and other staff, and deliver those via the TBTs, to stay 'connected'.

Achieving full (almost) attendance

To ensure content is consumed, rather than the TBT simply being a 'tick the box' exercise, Lightspace allows the TBT publisher to set the time it should take to complete.

Users must be actively scrolling content, whether it be text, video, images or a combination, or the timer will stop if the screen stops scrolling, meaning the TBT cannot be completed in less than the set time. "They could just sit there and move their thumb up and down for 5 minutes," McColl's Peter Shearer concedes, "but if they're going to do that they might as well read the toolbox."

Once the user taps the complete button they are marked as attending. The system has real time dashboarding so attendance is updated immediately and reports can be exported to track attendance electronically, replacing the previous paper-based system.

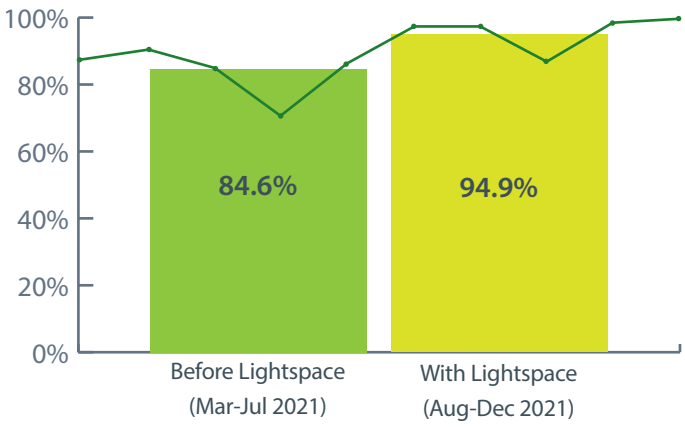

Figure 1: McColl's Toolbox Attendance

Reporting allows management to follow up drivers who have not attended that month's TBT as well as instantly accessing collated, graphed records. Management can also see if TBTs were attended in-person or via self-study.

McColl's target is monthly TBT attendance of 80 per cent. It has consistently been around 95 per cent since introducing the Lightspace tool.

To reach consistent 100 per cent attendance, McColl's is considering incentivising drivers with a financial incentive. That could be on an individual basis or putting drivers in teams, meaning drivers who fail to attend are also letting their 'teammates' down. "A bacon and egg breakfast or a bbq lunch always tend to bring people out too," adds Peter Shearer.

Addressing hazards

Typically, TBTs begin by addressing issues raised at the previous meeting. The Lightspace software includes an issues management module, accessible in both in-person and self-study modes.

All users can create an issue, which is then 'triaged' by the Safety Manager, assigned to staff and tracked through to resolution. All users are able to see what issues have been raised, their status and how they were resolved.

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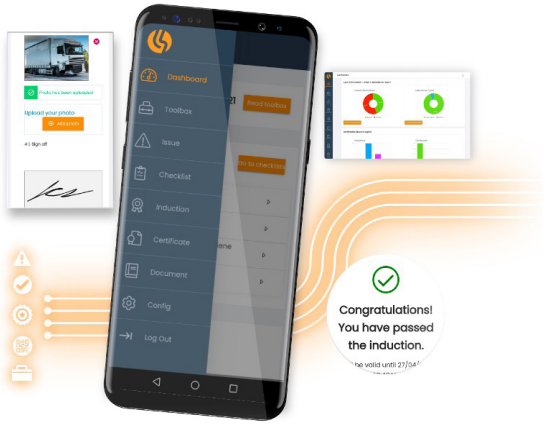
The module allows remote TBT participants to raise safety issues. In-person attendees can also raise issues via the app if they are not comfortable speaking up and raising them in the meeting. Functionality exists to allow uploading of photos of safety hazards, and there is also a reporting function. The system is regularly used with workers raising issues in this way each month.

The status of the issue is visible to the entire management team along with how long it has been 'open', allowing the organisation to track and report on the issue and ensuring issues are resolved in reasonable timeframes.

Where required, the worker who raised the issue will be consulted and, once it has been addressed, will receive a notification that the issue is complete and be advised of the outcome.

The system gives everybody in the business a voice and, because they can see the status of issues and how they were resolved, gives them the confidence that the company is listening and acting on their concerns and addressing hazards.



Technology As Enabler

Incident reporting

While the Lightspace system was initially used for toolbox meetings, McColl's has used the app to create its own incident reporting system. It allows drivers on the road to easily log an incident, including photos and such basic details as third party status, licence and registration. More in-depth investigation and reporting can be carried out when the driver returns to the depot.

The easy-to-use Lightspace Checklist is a form builder that allows subscribers to configure reports to their requirements, choosing their own questions and defining the types of answers.
If management wanted to incorporate near miss hazard reporting, for example (which McColl's completes through its DashMate system – see below) it could be added to the drop down menu and managers could build a tailored form.

McColl's has also trialled Lightspace for inductions as a proof of concept. It is currently using an external third party provider for inductions.

As Lightspace uses a subscription model, there is a one-off subscription fee to access all of the features of the app.

Combining efficiency and safety

While Lightspace is a recent addition to the McColl's suite of safety tools, the business has a long history of utilising technology solutions. Most have provided the dual benefit of improving the company's safety performance and efficiency while helping drivers to do their job.

The introduction of telematics is a case in point. McColl's used its telematics reporting to monitor speeding and harsh driving events, such as harsh braking or harsh cornering. This highlighted, for example, regular harsh cornering events near a popular rest area on the Princes Hwy south of Sydney and at a roundabout near one of McColl's depots, where competitors had experienced truck rollovers.

That information was communicated to drivers, via the monthly toolbox talks, so they reduced speed in those locations to prevent those harsh cornering events becoming incidents. Consistent with the experience across the transport industry, the introduction of telematics led to a change in driver behaviour.

Site inspections and fatigue management

In a similar way, McColl's document management system allows Divisions to share site inspections, helping to simultaneously make truck drivers' tasks safer and easier. Management completes site inspections and can upload PDFs and images to the document management system. Drivers can log in to see site entry and exits, for example, or weighbridge and sample point locations.

McColl's was also a trailblazer in use of electronic work diaries, building its own fatigue module before mandating electronic work diaries (EWD) was on the industry horizon. The electronic versions were built to assist drivers and, as it turned out, helped with the transition from paper diaries when EWDs became mandatory. The company also participated in early EWD trials, which has proven to be an effective tool in helping manage fatigue.

A workplace need

For many years, McColl's was 'forever chasing paperwork' to ensure drivers returned consignment notes and delivery dockets so the company had them on record. When it decided to pursue a technology-based solution, the lack of a suitable off-the-shelf option meant it engaged external developers to work with its own team to build a purpose-built system. The result is the company's communication interface between operations and the drivers. Drivers are sent information on required customer deliveries, and drivers respond with the time of delivery and the volume of material delivered.

Recording washes

For any company that transports food, ensuring its tankers are thoroughly cleaned is imperative. Truck washes also need to be recorded and validated. DashMate, the system McColl's uses to communicate with its drivers, is also used to help move recording of washes away from paper to electronic means. Ironically, the ongoing pandemic has helped that aim, with people more reluctant to handle hard copy wash lists touched by others.

Driving simulator

McColl's made a significant investment and purchased a driving simulator to help train drivers. Set up in a van, the simulator (pictured) mimics the experience of driving a 6-wheeler truck, allowing driver trainers to simulate incidents drivers may encounter, such as a steer tyre blowing out, to educate them about and allow them to practice safe responses.

As a mobile simulator, it travels to deliver driver training in multiple locations, and has been an effective promotional tool with customers and at public events, including charity fundraisers.

Understanding The Why

McColl's Transport has made a sustained and significant investment in safety. While there has also been a major return on investment, including a reduction in incident and WorkCover costs for example (see 'Results' section over the page), its primary motivation continues to be making its drivers and the general public as safe as possible, particularly given that drivers are in charge of vehicles as large as 60 tonnes.

McColl's attitude to driver safety is a key tenet of how it has overcome resistance to the introduction of new measures, continually focusing on the reason for new measures and educating drivers as demands and expectations of them change over time.

The introduction of outward facing cameras, for example, initially created "a fair bit of pushback". However, the cameras were quickly accepted after demonstrating, in major incidents, that McColl's drivers were not at fault. In one incident, a milk collection tanker turning into a farm driveway was clipped by a 4WD. The 4WD driver was not injured but accused the truck driver of not having indicated. However, the indicator could clearly be heard in the audio from the camera vision, substantiating the McColl's driver had done the right thing.

While being able to provide such 'proof' to authorities is beneficial, it is also important for the drivers concerned. This has particularly been the case in incidents of suicide by truck. Being able to review what actually happened in these incidents has been "very helpful" to individual drivers, particular in one case where the driver was finding it difficult to come to terms with the incident, but the footage showed the driver had done everything possible to avoid the incident.

In more recent times, the introduction of inward facing cameras saw less resistance from drivers, due to a large degree to the success of the outward facing cameras.

The company is constantly searching for new ways to keep its drivers safe, recognising that safety is a journey, while helping them do their job. It is now trialling Seeing Machines' eye-tracking technology, which monitors signs of driver fatigue and alerts the driver, to assess its potential in preventing incidents.

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An NRSPP Road Transport Suicide Prevention Working Group is leading efforts to support drivers affected by 'suicide by truck' incidents and to raise awareness of the issue. To find out more, visit nrspp.org.au.

If this case study has raised any issues, please contact:

- ***Lifeline:***
  13 11 14
- ***Suicide Call Back Service:***
  1300 659 467
  Suicidecallbackservice.org.au
- ***Beyond Blue***
  1300 224 636
  beyondblue.org.au/forums
- ***MensLine Australia***
  1300 789 978
  menslineorg.au

Safety and Impact on Performance

Toolboxes

- Attendance rates have increased and are consistently close to full attendance
- Attendance reporting is in real time, meaning workers who have not attended can be easily followed up and 'serial offenders' identified
- Data entry and other overheads associated with collating paperwork from a disparate workforce to determine attendance rates have been removed
- Effective communication – it is much easier to understand the message with images and video and for the presenter to engage the audience when they're not shuffling paperwork

Checklists

- Alerts ensure the 'right' people are notified of any critical action required and that nothing 'falls through the cracks'
- Costs associated with re-keying data, paperwork, postage, scanning and filing have been removed
- Mandatory fields determine that required data is collected first time, eliminating the need to travel to site again
- Use of photos and images aids reviews from head office
- All registrations are located in one place, allowing for robust reporting and trend analysis

Telematics

- The introduction of telematics has driven dramatic reductions in over speed, harsh braking and harsh cornering events
- Fuel consumption has improved

WorkCover

- WorkCover costs have reduced since McColl's focused communications through toolbox meetings

EWDs and driver fatigue

- McColl's inhouse fatigue management system DashMate has helped drivers manage fatigue for the past decade
- It is transitioning drivers to the Smart eDriver application, following recent approval by the regulator of a compliant EWD

3 Key Implementation Lessons

Be brave, and persist

Expect resistance to measures introduced to improve safety, particularly measures that disrupt the way things have previously been done for long periods. "When we put telematics and then the cameras in the trucks, some drivers said: "you put one of those things in my truck and I won't be here tomorrow".

If the measure is likely to be effective from a safety perspective, follow through on implementation – drivers will accept it once the benefits are clear. Safety is a journey where continual persistence is required.

Consult

The message from the McColl's experience is don't be frightened of undertaking the safety journey, but ensure that workers, particularly drivers, are also taken on the journey by consulting them before measures are implemented. This approach increases engagement and acceptance.

When McColl's introduced outward-facing cameras, for example, information was sent directly to drivers and the measure was raised in toolbox talks, so drivers understood what was being proposed, why and, most importantly, had the opportunity to have their say or raise concerns.

Focus on the benefits

As part of consultation, ensure expected benefits of any safety measures are clearly communicated. Emphasise the motivation for the measures is not 'spying on' or 'crucifying' drivers for doing the wrong thing but helping them be safer.

Highlight where measures will also assist drivers to complete their work and make their daily operations easier and more efficient. Share positive outcomes, such as examples highlighted earlier where cameras had substantiated driver actions in incidents, in toolbox talks and other driver communication to reinforce those benefits.

That will increase acceptance of and reduce resistance to subsequent safety measures.