

PINPOINTER ACCURACY

GPS tracking specialist Pinpointers has teamed up with Distinctive Systems to integrate vehicle location into its Coach Manager package. And, as Mike Morgan discovers, there's the added benefit of web pages, which can be password protected for selected public access

The fleet tracking system supplied by Poole-based Pinpointers Telematics can now support seamless integration with Distinctive Systems' industry-standard Coach Manager booking system. And, in a simultaneous development, Pinpointers' customers can provide live web-based status updates to their own end users, displaying in real time the position of vehicles on a map.

For example, if a coach operator was carrying children on a school trip, the new system would provide parents and teachers with accurate, real-time updates on exactly where the coach is and therefore when it is going to arrive. This would avoid children having to wait by the roadside.

The map, access to which is password

protected, can be overlaid with the bus routes where required.

■ COACH MANAGER INTEGRATION

The integrated system will be demonstrated on the Distinctive Systems stand at next week's Euro Bus Expo show at the NEC, 4-6 November.

Distinctive's Coach Manager is a booking system for private hire and contract work specially designed for coach, minibus, chauffeur and community transport operators. It is powerful enough for even the largest operators, yet still affordable for smaller operators. It is used by over 350 coach and bus operators, and provides facilities for private and contract hire bookings.

Integration with Pinpointers' tracking

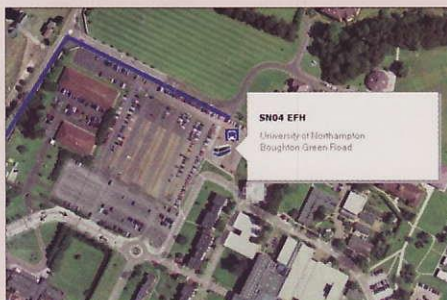


Souls of Olney: Capability offers them a competitive advantage that will help them win and retain new customers

software means that Coach Manager bookings and movements can be automatically linked and displayed on the public web page relevant to that booking. By changing the assigned vehicle in Coach Manager, the public view of which vehicle is on that route is automatically updated.

The public web pages can be password-protected, so access to the tracking information is restricted to only those end customers that are specifically authorised.

Operators can control the duration of each public web page that they create. For example, if an end customer is expecting a delivery within a pre-arranged time slot, they could be granted access to the system only



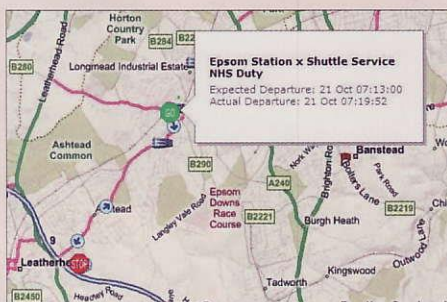
Vehicle location pin pointed in real time

Status
Completed (Late) at 21/10/2008 07:19:52, arrived at 21-Oct 07:14, late Turnaround 5m 3s
From 'Epsom Base (StartBase)' to 'Epsom Station x Shuttle Service NHS Duty (Destination)'
Completed (Late) at 21/10/2008 07:34:59, arrived at 21-Oct 07:29, late Turnaround 5m 2s
From 'Epsom Station x Shuttle Service NHS Duty (Pickup)' to 'Leatherhead NHS Duty (Destination)'
Completed (On Time) at 21/10/2008 09:33:51, arrived at 21-Oct 09:28 Turnaround 5m 2s
From 'Leatherhead NHS Duty 3 (Destination)' to 'Epsom Station x Shuttle (Pickup)'
Completed (Early) at 21/10/2008 15:50:41, arrived at 21-Oct 09:38, early Turnaround 6h 12m 1s
From 'Epsom Station x Shuttle Service NHS Duty (Pickup)' to 'Epsom Base (Destination)'

Reports include route, speeds and idling



Public view is automatically updated



Exact location and time of arrival displayed



Epsom uses Pinpointers to improve reliability



Routes can be overlaid on map



Epsom Coaches: Turned to Pinpointers



Jon Pope: 'Public web access a first'

during that time, enabling them to see exactly when the delivery will arrive.

Northamptonshire operator Soul Brothers of Olney has been using Pinpointers since January 2006, introducing vehicle tracking at a cost of £20,000 on 41 vehicles.

"We are already trialling this system, which we expect to help us keep our vehicles on schedule, and save us time and money," said Managing Director David Soul. And for operators such as Soul Brothers, this new capability of linking Pinpointers to Coach Manager offers them a competitive advantage that will help them win and retain new customers. David told *routeone* that universities in particular appreciated this facility. However, the web service is likely to be offered to private schools only, because David does not think it will be seen as a benefit by local authorities.

Nevertheless, he is convinced of the benefits to his business. David, who has nearly three years experience of Pinpointers, said: "We look on it as giving an added dimension to customer service. It is an excellent tool for answering enquiries. We've found that a lot of the time we were being blamed for something that wasn't our fault.

"It's also a way of keeping an eye on fuel consumption," he said, while Souls also appreciates that inbound call volumes are reduced, leading to cost savings, because its customers can obtain the information they require on vehicle movements directly from the internet. Integration with Coach Manager provides a welcome reduction in paperwork, according to David.

"The new public web access pages are a first for the vehicle tracking industry, and we see many opportunities for our customers to improve their customer service and reduce their workload with this new capability," said Jon Pope, Sales Director of Pinpointers. "This is also a tool that operators can use to

generate revenue from their existing contracts, by offering it as a value added part of the service.

"As end customers are increasingly using the internet day to day, providing this kind of information portal is providing information in a way they find easily accessible," said Jon. "This avoids the frustration that customers experience when they have to wait at home for hours for a courier delivery, or unnecessarily queue in the rain for a bus that arrives late."

With the new facility, all contract and private hire bookings together with their associated movements are automatically loaded into the Pinpointers Jobs Management Suite. For every vehicle that has a Pinpointers tracking system installed, a corresponding Job is created for each movement in Coach Manager. The operators can then monitor the performance of their bookings in real time on the Pinpointers Web Interface.

Not only can the operators see where the vehicles are, they can also see the context of what they are doing in relation to their business, and manage problems accordingly.

Other operators in trials with the new system include Epsom Coaches, which turned to Pinpointers almost five years ago for a way of improving service performance on bus routes operated on behalf of Transport for London. However, the benefits compelled the Surrey-based company to extent it to its coach fleet, giving what Operations Director Steve Whiteway calls "retrospective analysis" when it comes to following up complaints about vehicles being late.

There are other benefits "We use it to record the time the drivers finish," said Steve. "They can't argue with the satellite."

Epsom also uses Pinpointers on key contracts, providing its customers with reports that confirm the actual times of arrival.

Reports available include the route taken, speeds, and vehicle idling, while Steve

Whiteway says that further applications could include keeping track of fitters who are out on the road on call-out.

The cost of Pinpointers to Epsom is £18 per month per vehicle. Installation of the on-board equipment costs between £450 and £500.

"This new capability is straightforward to use for coach and bus operators, and gives them real-time updates that will enable them to spot and solve any problems as early as possible," said Jon Pope. "In conjunction with our new public web page facility, the customers can be given visibility of the location of the coach.

This is a powerful feature from which many customers will benefit. You can give the school office visibility of where the school bus is, or a relative can see where you are while away on a tour or holiday. Furthermore, the route overlay option allows the operator to create routes that can be clearly seen on the maps, making it very easy to keep an eye on the progress of each vehicle assigned to that task."

The new system can make use of a new feature in the Pinpointers' Jobs Management Suite, which combines the power of the Pinpointers tracking system with the Garmin nüvi SatNav range. With a Garmin SatNav in the driver's cab, movements from Coach Manager are automatically imported into Pinpointers' system and then communicated directly to the driver's SatNav. Two way messaging and constant ETA (estimated time of arrival) feedback are also further features.

● **Jon Pope can be contacted via Distinctive Systems, Stand 5/A10 at Euro Bus Expo NEC, 4-6 November.**

FACT FILE

■ ABOUT PINPOINTERS

Pinpointers is a market-leading provider of vehicle tracking and mobile workforce management solutions, with customers including Orange, Procter & Gamble and Arqiva. The company's products give customers visibility of their remote workforce, its whereabouts and current status, and deliver real-time information via a fully managed service. This enables companies to increase profitability, increase efficiency, improve control and manage risk. For more information see www.pinpointers.com

■ ABOUT DISTINCTIVE SYSTEMS

Distinctive Systems is an independent software vendor specialising in the development of products for coach and bus companies. Established for 25 years it has supplied more than 1,750 systems to operators. Its range of software is comprehensive and includes systems for managing coach-based private hires, regular contract work, community transport operations, extended tours, day excursions, express services and vehicle maintenance. For more information see www.distinctivesystems.com.