

SmartEquip Procurement online fleet support is proving useful amid the shortage in service technician labour, Mause says.

The skills shortage coupled with skyrocketing fuel prices and related cost hikes is seeing demand for rental software accelerate, writes Belinda Smart.

Gem One has introduced CAN Data - which allows machine devices to communicate with each other - to its Onyx fleet management solution.

Working smarter

The shortage of workers in the construction industry allied to high inflation rates on costs, means that rental businesses are placing a higher value than ever on digital tools to maximise productivity.

“Rental companies are looking for ways to drive efficiency and growth in a market with increasing costs, where the demand for both equipment and skilled workers is outpacing supply,” says Phil Mause, Managing Director of US-based Rouse Analytics.

Rouse, which collates enormous amounts of rental operating data as well as used equipment pricing, is a sister company to SmartEquip - the equipment lifecycle management, service and procurement platform - both having been acquired by Ritchie Bros over the past two years.

Mause says that SmartEquip Procurement - an online fleet support network - is attracting high demand due to the shortage in service technician labour.

Designed to support technicians’ workflow, it provides product support information, inventory management technology, and enables technicians to submit purchase orders for multiple pieces of equipment, across all fleet brands.

“In addition, the system automates the creation of work and purchase orders, the maintenance of item master files in rental management and other ERP systems.”

Customers report as much as a 40% increase in service technician productivity, he says.

Meanwhile, Rouse’s own Rental mobile app – which now supports dynamic pricing - is also attracting demand from sales reps and fleet managers.

It allows for customisable pricing rules that adjust book and floor pricing in real-time based on a variety of key metrics. Mause says this rule-based dynamic pricing helps reduce the time and effort that goes into managing changes while increasing utilisation and profit.

Upskilling benefits

In April, Netherlands-based software supplier To-Increase launched DynaRent for D365 Sales. Described as an end-to-end integrated solution, D365 is targeted at rental firms’ sales, finance, and supply chain management (SCM) teams, offering “a unified view of customer data on a single platform.”

Thomas Sonnichsen, Sales Specialist for DynaRent, tells *IRN* that, among its benefits, the platform helps upskill rental operatives.





MachineMax technology is increasingly used to monitor behaviour and upskill workers.

“If I come into a new rental organisation and I need to upskill quickly on the business process on how we process, for example, a rental order, that process is laid out for me, and the system can show me how to do it.”

Cor Tiemens, Sales Manager Rental and Leasing at To-Increase, adds that by providing transparency on construction projects’ needs and connecting these with rental, the system supports a “shift to project driven rental, whereby rental firms are more fully engaged across all of the project’s needs.

Key features demonstrate this, such as the generation of serialised rental numbers for traditionally unserialised items such as fencing and scaffolding. The system also handles hires that have a combination of serialised items and a human element, for example, a mobile crane rental that might include the driver, or a series of drivers.

A key benefit of the software is that it’s embedded in Microsoft’s Cloud ERP, Tiemens tells *IRN*.

“Our technology is written with the Microsoft technology stack. We use all the various applications and technologies - Teams, Excel, Outlook - to create our solutions and what that does that gives us direct access to Microsoft Development team with regards to the ERP solutions.”

The solution is also fostering a shift towards a Product as a Service (PaaS) model that enables a fusion of manufacturing with rental. “It’s a business model that helps manufacturers deliver not just products, but also rental support services, as part of long- or short-term subscription contracts.”

Minimising the pain

There is no magic bullet on staff shortages and productivity, says Patrick Smets, CEO of GemOne - the machine telematics specialist with origins 10 years ago in Australia and now with offices in Belgium and the US – “but fleet management solutions can ensure that rental companies help their current staff to work as efficiently as possible, minimising the overall pain felt from labour shortage.”

The company recently launched CAN

Point of Rental has invested in self-guided user tutorials to help upskill rental specialists.



Digital solutions to support contractors

CONTRACTOR AIDS

A number of technology companies are developing software and platforms that can help contractors make the most of their rented equipment, or give them easy access to equipment suppliers.

Italy-headquartered Rentmas, the online rental sharing platform, comprises a portal designed to reduce the complexity of rental procedures.

“Costs can be amortised, thanks the use of algorithms and software, enabling you to optimise processes avoiding wasting resources and time,” Rentmas co-founder Daniela Niederstätter (and sister of co-founder Manuel Niederstätter) tells *IRN*.

She predicts that demand for digital solutions is set to increase and that data from interconnected machines will become more valuable, to “enable rental companies to offer the best machine in the best condition to the right client.”

FUEL EFFICIENCIES

In the US, EquipmentShare has a unique perspective on the software needs of the rental industry – as both an equipment rental and digital technology business.

Its T3 fleet management platform has been given some added features that are relevant to a cost constrained sector, says Angela Page, T3 Director of Product, speaking to *IRN*.

The recently released T3 Analytics app helps customers monitor their fuel usage and costs, specifically with handy features such as Asset Idle and Fuel Consumption Reports and idle duration alerts.

Meanwhile the T3 RentOps app gives contractors control over their fleet, giving them the ability efficiently assign assets to projects, which creates better transparency and collaboration.

SUPPORTING COLLABORATION

California based software supplier Linarc, meanwhile, describes itself as a collaborative project management platform. It is targeted at contractors but has benefits for rental companies, says CEO and founder Shanthi Rajan.

“Establishing a working relationship with rental companies can be a make-or-break decision for a contractor; and equipment rental companies that constantly upgrade and maintain their fleet can be a good partner.

“With Linarc, the equipment schedule can be easily shared with a rental company to plan on-site delivery.”

Data, an addition to its Onyx fleet management solution. ‘CAN’ stands for Controller Area Network bus, which allows the machine’s devices to communicate with each other and provides information on the status of machines.

“This real-time data is invaluable: in helping prevent serious damage to the machine and the operator; in enabling quick responses to issues, thus minimising machine downtime; and in facilitating remote diagnostics so that technicians can deal with issues efficiently without needing to be near a machine.”

Gem One has also launched a

Battery Powered Tracker for non-powered assets – for example containers, trailers, and equipment attachments – and a Battery Monitoring Solution to help businesses manage expensive industrial batteries and prolong their lifespan.

Skilling up

US supplier Point of Rental is tackling skills deficits head on, James Morley, SVP of Product Management, tells *IRN*, with a recently launched training portal that teaches new staff about Point of Rental software.

“The easiest way to cope with skills shortages is by making everyone in the company more knowledgeable”, he says, “Rental software gets all your information in one easy-to-access place, which helps make even your new hires seem like they’ve been with you for ages.

“We’ve heavily invested in our product user experience to ensure our software processes are as intuitive as possible. >

For the things that require a little more knowledge, we've built self-guided user tutorials and made it possible for management to assign tutorials, track employee progress, and see course completions."

Also helping rental professionals upskill is UK provider InspHire. Sales Director Martin Bestwick tells *IRN* that InspHire enables users of all IT abilities to swiftly learn key business tasks.

"By making it easy for staff to succeed in their roles, rental companies experience a boost in staff retention and productivity. But this feature also makes rentals more fluent from a human resource perspective because staff can be moved around the operation as required, creating a more resilient business model.

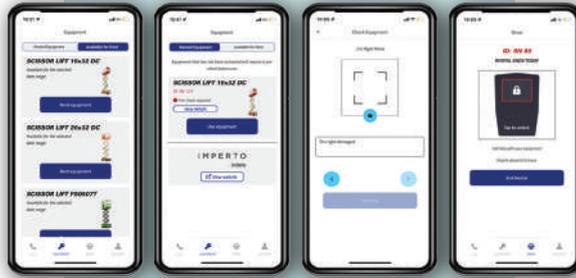
"Additionally, inspHire reduces the need for specialised roles such as company accountants. The software can run accounts or month-end reports in a quarter of the usual time frame, making both editions of inspHire skilled and trusted team members."

Jennifer Thomson, Chief Growth Officer at equipment management platform MachineMax, says the skills shortage is a hot topic for many of its customers; "what we are seeing as a result of this is a focus on monitoring behaviour and upskilling individuals."

"As with all MachineMax data, our ambition is to enable users to make positive, proactive decisions; identifying operators who are either great examples of best practise or those that would benefit from additional support and training are just some examples of how the platform is being used."

Data management

While digitalisation brings clear benefits, the volume and diversity of data also needs to be managed, which is where



Digital security

Irdeto is a Netherlands-based company that provides revenue protection and cybersecurity for the connected industries. It offers a "digital key" for rental companies, enabling access-based digital rental solutions.

"Most simply, it ensures contractors with rented machines get access, and others don't," says Niels Haverkorn, General Manager for Connected Transport at Irdeto.

"One use case is equipment pools on large projects where our digital-key infrastructure platform enables multiple contractors to use the same machines."

New player

Also from the Netherlands, Intrador software was developed for the automotive sector and later this year is launching solutions for construction rental. It is understood these will be based on Intrador's existing Pick-up & Return App which documents vehicles for rental purposes. There is also an Inspection App including features such as 'Scan to Start'.

specialists such as Australian firm Inauro come into play. Inauro's Perspio is a data fusion platform that captures and analyses data from connected devices, assets and systems; it also combines data from multiple sources into a single resource.

Inauro CCO Max Girault tells *IRN*, "The skilled labour shortage left by the pandemic is leaving a gap in a lot of rental workforces. Increasingly, the answer to that lies in automation and smart software integration, so that time-poor specialists have the right data made available to them instantly, without having to look for it."

Another emerging issue is the rise of electric equipment, which often requires specific knowledge and labour, Girault tells *IRN*.

"As a rental company, how often do you get calls in the morning telling you a piece of electric equipment won't start, to find out it just hadn't been plugged in overnight? What if you were able to leverage the telemetry of that asset to automatically let the customer know the day before when everyone leaves the site that asset X, Y and S are not plugged in?"

e-commerce solution

Jack Samatov is CEO of US supplier Relentless Software Solutions, which uses an integration process to turn storefront platforms into rental eCommerce platforms.

Samatov says "Having a proper rental software workflow in place that spans storefront to warehouse not only makes life easier for rental customers, but it takes onerous tasks off the sales team's plate.

And by integrating custom-developed web, mobile and e-commerce interfaces, companies can "extend the useful life of those legacy apps" while streamlining operations with an eCommerce site.

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