



Editors note: Teletrac Inc. and Navman Wireless are now merged as a global telematics powerhouse. This content was created prior to the unification of both brands.

Kitchen table to high tech – building a 21st century plumbing business

Taking a 'kitchen table' business into the 21st century. It's a big challenge and one that Russ Louie of BPS Plumbing chose to face with the help of some smart technology and systems integration.

BPS Plumbing covers Paihia, Kaikohe and Kerikeri in Northland. Russ and his team do a range of rural work from irrigation supply, dam supply, pumps, water tanks, to sewerage and septic tanks. The business also does urban plumbing work.

BPS Plumbing has three vans and a support ute. The team works across a large geographical area, often driving for an hour to reach a job site, or further if the plumber needs to visit a merchant to get parts.

Tracking the fleet

Starting 10 years ago as a one man band, Russ found that as his fleet of vehicles grew, he was having problems handling vehicle maintenance. He didn't know how far the vans had travelled, so regular maintenance scheduling was hard, maintenance bills were coming in, but they weren't always charging out mileage correctly so weren't covering those costs.

Russ went looking for a better way to manage his fleet, and decided on the Teletrac Navman GPS fleet management system. In late 2015, BPS Plumbing had Qube tracking units installed into the vehicles and started using Teletrac Navman's DIRECTOR software.

Getting strategic

Installing a fleet management system was part of Russ' strategy to uplift his business. Early in 2015 he decided to expand the business and enlisted the help of a business mentor. The Teletrac Navman system has become a management tool, according to Russ.

"I can see where the vehicles are and check in on them anytime I need. I use the smartphone app a lot, it's great. Where ever I am I can take a quick look at where all the guys are to make sure everything is ok. The maintenance scheduling and reporting has been crucial for us as Northland has more metal roads than anywhere in the country, so it's pretty rough on the vehicles."

Smart integration

Integrating the Teletrac Navman software with job management software SmartTrade has been another big leap forward for BPS Plumbing. SmartTrade covers a range of things including job costing, quoting, scheduling, timesheets and invoicing.

"The integration saves time so I can do other work on the business." Russ Louie, Director.

"We installed SmartTrade about three years ago. Before it, I had a typical "kitchen table" business—slaving over paper invoices at night. It was well out of control. I'd put off the invoicing for as long as possible of course, and then the paperwork would really build up.

"All my major suppliers use SmartTrade so it makes ordering and invoicing so much easier. I also use it to see how a job is progressing. Bigger pieces of work may be carried out over several months, so I can now keep a close eye on how the costs are going."



"I'm now running a 21st century business. Before the integration we were prehistoric, it was so clunky and time consuming. Now we are efficient, fast, and responsive." Russ Louie, Director.

The integration between the Teletrac Navman system and the SmartTrade system allows Russ to generate reports about where his plumbers drove, how far, how long they were there, then compare this with the timesheets.

Before the integration, charging for travel was a bit speculative. Russ says they used to try and work it out using Google Maps. Now clients are charged the exact amount for travel.

"If one of the boys travels from Kerikeri to Paihia, then to a merchant in Kerikeri, then to a side job, then back to the Paihia job, now I have all the information I need to correctly assign the travel charges to the right clients."

The integration has also created a huge saving in time and paperwork.

"I just hate paperwork. I used to keep putting it off but this created cashflow problems. Now with the integration between SmartTrade and Teletrac Navman we're keeping on top of invoices. I'm monitoring big jobs on a weekly basis, checking the costs against the quote – the ability to do this is priceless."

Safety

BPS Plumbing often has plumbers travelling to remote areas of the Hokianga. Russ knows how long it will take them to get there, but mobile coverage can be patchy so safety is a concern. One of the big clients has multiple unmanned job sites across the Hokianga so when one of his staff does a site visit, he's on his own. But now with the Teletrac Navman system, Russ can see where vans are, if they are travelling or stationary at the client site, and watch them returning.

"It's about better safety management and helping us meet our duty of care," says Russ.

Having Teletrac Navman has also stopped a lot of speeding.

"We introduced a \$20 fine if our guys go over a pre-determined speed limit on the GPS tracker – it's a great contribution to our social fund!" says Russ.

Conclusion

"I'm now running a 21st century business," says Russ. "Before the integration we were prehistoric, it was so clunky and time consuming. Now we are efficient, fast, and responsive. I can see where invoicing is going really quickly, so I can project cashflow much better.

"Peace of mind is priceless and time is everything, I can't make more time! The integration saves time so I can do other work on the business."

Benefits:

- Significant time savings through use of integrated systems
- Much better visibility into job progress and more accurate costs
- More efficient and effective maintenance scheduling reduces costs
- Improved safety management

Brought to you by Teletrac Navman in partnership with SmartTrade and Master Plumbers

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Job Management Software



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