

Hide and Seek is a game best left to kids.

How Swift makes sure its trailers are visible, even when they're out of sight.

The Tale of 25 Trailers

Imagine you have to keep track of one dry van. Pretty easy, right? Just look out your office window and you can see it there in the yard where it's supposed to be.

Now imagine you have to take that trailer to your customer's warehouse and leave it to be loaded. You knew where it was when you dropped it off and you'll know where it is when you pick it up. But what goes on while it's out of your sight?

To come close to what Swift Transportation has to deal with, multiply that dry van by 60,000. Now imagine those vans scattered across the country at countless terminals or tethered to traveling tractors.

That's what Frank Larance, Director of Asset Utilization and Equipment Sales for Swift, does every day. Larance has been managing Swift's trailer and tractor fleets for more than four years.

When a new contract comes in, Larance's team has to assign equipment to it, then manage how that equipment is utilized throughout the life of the contract. For that task, they rely on trailer tracking. (It's fortunate that the telematics team reports to Larance, too!)

In 2011, Larance rebuilt Swift's trail-

er management system to make the myriad of tasks that go into providing top-notch customer service more manageable.

Nevertheless, no matter how much planning you put into the process of managing your trailer fleet, that process can be messy, which is why Swift relies on trailer tracking.

"Most carriers face the same challenge of keeping track of equipment when many folks have their hands in the pot," said Larance. "Our customers can assign our trailers to other carriers, or put them on loads or into other operations we didn't authorize. As a result, trailers can move to other parts of the country, not under a Swift load. And without a tracking system they'd be difficult to locate."

He gives an example, "In late 2014, we had to rent about 25 trailers out of the Dallas facility of a lessor that doesn't offer trailer tracking.



Headquarters:
Phoenix, AZ

40+ facilities in the US and Mexico

Specialty:
Largest full truckload carrier in North America

Delivery:
More than 6 million miles a day throughout the US, Canada and Mexico

Trailers in fleet:
60,000

Tractors in fleet:
17,000+

Drivers:
20,000 including owner-operators

The trailers were for one of our dedicated accounts that services a wide network outside the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex.”

When it was time to return the trailers to the rental company, Swift found 12 of them easily, but the others took some additional effort to locate. “Without the benefit of tracking, it’s more of a manual hunt-and-peck operation,” Larance said. “One had made its way to Colorado; no one can tell us how it happened. Fortunately, we found it, tripped it to Arizona and turned it in. The problem was we had to pay for the additional days the trailer was out on lease.”

Trailer Tracking and the Truth

It’s no wonder that Larance insists that all trailers operated by Swift—whether owned or rented—have tracking. (The business environment doesn’t always cooperate, but such guidelines help.)

From beginning to end of a customer contract, Larance says, trailer tracking plays a part.

With a fleet the size of Swift’s, dispatchers depend on untethered tracking to direct drivers to trailers efficiently.

But trailer tracking serves an even more crucial purpose for this multi-billion-dollar carrier: it keeps



pick-ups and deliveries in gear and helps transmit revenue to Swift’s bottom line. “Trailer tracking gives us more accurate info,” said Larance, “so we can keep our customers’ freight moving.”

“When we get an order, we enter a trailer number and specify that the trailer will go from Point A to Point B,” said Larance. “We even built a program on the back end of the system that reconciles trailer locations. It says, ‘Here’s where the system says that trailer is, but here’s where tracking says it is.’”

That double-check mitigates human error so Swift can keep its promise to provide best-in-class transportation solutions to its customers.

Examining XTRA

“Trailer tracking is a huge benefit of

renting from XTRA,” said Larance. “And XTRA is very easy to do business with. Processes are always fast and easy. Any request is addressed promptly, with good, accurate info. When we run into issues where Swift has moved trailers outside of their domicile area, XTRA works with us and goes out of their way to accommodate us, to be flexible.

“I also like the reporting feature on the website. It gives me accurate data about what’s on rent and what’s off. We get very timely data, too. If a trailer is damaged, notification comes back quickly and is thoroughly explained. That has actually allowed me to provide an extra level of detail for our customers—they’re more receptive to their responsibility when they can see it clearly spelled out with photos and line-item details of the damage.”

“Those line-item details also allow us to isolate items we’re responsible for so we can coach our own employees to avoid damage on both our rental trailers and our own fleet. Reports help us show if damage is occurring with a higher frequency in some areas, such as a top corner radius post

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or a section of bottom rail.”

Larance also appreciates the XTRA Lease footprint because there’s lots of overlap between XTRA Lease and Swift locations. He said, “When we need equipment, more often than not, it’s close to one of our terminal locations, so we can go right into that facility with minimal empty miles.”

Online Access

Larance relies on his online XTRA Access account, “primarily to see what’s out there and what’s been turned in.” Occasionally he’ll download all of the most recent location data “and use that to confirm that our rented assets are located where our customers and our own TMS say they are.”

He added that having those checks along the way is beneficial, but it’s especially so for Black Friday work, where trailers go through several staging points before they reach their final destination. “Tracking helps us keep our operations running smoothly and avoid surprises,” he said.

Larance runs the Rental & Lease Activity report most often. “This one report gives me all the info I need for ordinary operations:



Tracking enables me to say to a customer, ‘We rented 20 trailers for you, but I have a report that shows you’re only using 15 of them. Let’s pull back and see if we can cut some dollars out of the contract.’”

- what’s active
- what’s terminated
- outbound date
- outbound city
- trailer-level detail, such as VIN, model year, manufacturer, XTRA Lease trailer number

“Having this data electronically saves me a lot of time. I run my report, pull it into Excel and bounce it off our system data to get an accurate view of how our rented assets are being used.

“When we rent a trailer, we upload the XTRA Lease trailer number into our TMS as if it’s a Swift-owned asset. Swift and XTRA Lease trailer numbers sometimes overlap—the Rental & Lease Activity report helps me quickly isolate where we might have conflicts, so I can do a small renumbering of the XTRA trailers in our system.

“It also helps that this report shows trailer specs. During 4th quarter, we rent lots of trailers from XTRA Lease and our rental agreements allow us to return like-type trailers to any XTRA Lease branch. This report lets me know the like-type I can return and which branch I can return it to.”

Ringing up Results

Swift uses trailer tracking to help

their customers save money.

“I really appreciate that tracking gives you the information to evaluate a business decision,” said Larance, “to be able to say to a customer, ‘We’ve rented 20 trailers for you, but I see you’re only using 15 of them. I have a report that shows five of them have been idle for 10 days or more.’”

“I did that recently when we rented some trailers for a customer who felt he needed 50 of them. Two weeks later, I ran a report on those trailers and went back to the customer with data that showed 10% of his trailer fleet wasn’t doing much. I said, ‘Let’s pull back and see if we can cut some dollars out of the contract.’”

Going the extra mile to provide that kind of customer service is what drives Swift Transportation to the top of the transportation industry year after year. XTRA is proud to play a small part in that success.

