Fleet managers turn to technology for security

Kenyan entrepreneurs have found these systems particularly useful for fleet management in the wake of increasing cases of vehicle theft, fuel adulteration, diversion of company resources and transportation of contraband goods.

Is your driver using the company car to run personal errands or even as a taxi service? Technology is offering an answer to this and other business operation challenges such as motor vehicle theft, fuel consumption or loss of goods in transit.

Commonly known as ‘the big brother’, technology based business monitoring systems are offering managers a real-time peep into what their employees are doing and the cost of such activities to their business.

Kenyan entrepreneurs have found these systems particularly useful for fleet management in the wake of increasing cases of fuel theft and fuel adulteration in the market.

Suppliers say three versions of technology-based tracking systems are available in East Africa. Those that rely on a mix of Global Positioning System (GPS) and GSM systems, Radio Frequency Systems and satellite-based platforms.

Under the GPS/GSM system, satellite technology is used to monitor fleets with mobile phones delivering information to end users. Through the mobile phone, one can make a command, for example, to locate a car or retrieve fuel consumption information among many other functions.

Cost effectiveness

Technology experts say the GPS/GSM system is cheaper compared to satellite-based technology because one only needs to make a single payment for access to all information generated. The only extra cost that the user incurs is the Short Message Service (SMS) charge levied by the service provider.

In Kenya, the Tramigo software is the most common GPS/GSM solution priced at about Shs40,000 for complete installation. The system also offers detailed information such as the exact location of cars or items. Its limitation is that it depends on the mobile provider network coverage and cannot deliver real-time information beyond the network coverage area.

The Radio Frequency System on the other hand runs on masts mounted by the service provider. This means they may not work well in areas where the provider does not have such infrastructure. Its strongest point is that it can detect vehicles within buildings or even those that are hidden underground.

But unlike the GPS/GSM system that attracts a one-time fee, the RFS system attracts a monthly charge of between Sh2,000 to Sh3,000 besides the equipment fee of Shs75,000. The satellite system uses satellite phones, whose pricing remains beyond the reach of most potential users such as matatus operators. But its advantage is in the fact that it can locate or track a vehicle in any part of the globe.

Rising demand for fleet management systems has met a corresponding increase in the number of service providers although many consumers have complained that most of the packages do not fit their needs. “Most service providers assume that they know what the client wants even before they hear it and do not take time to listen before installing a particular gadget or advising on the best solution,” said Aloyce Obare, the managing director of Car Search, a fleet management consultancy.

A good fleet management system not only enables a company to manage its overheads, but also integrate with other systems such as finance.

Mr Obare says a good fleet management system not only enables a company to manage its overheads but also integrate with other systems such as finance. Industry data indicates that adulteration is the most common problem fleet managers face. Fuel adulteration not only results in less mileage, but also causes damage to the vehicle.

Mr Obare said lack of proper information on which system to invest in has left many organizations and individuals with the wrong devices. While larger firms benefit from internal IT expertise for advice, small firms or individuals are particularly at risk of investing in inappropriate systems.

Procurement also remains a challenge to large NGOs operating fleets used to deliver relief services in the region. Service providers say information on the best means of covering these organizations with the right solutions is lacking. This is because some of the providers have made the industry as secretive as possible, and are not regulated.

Lack of clear objectives by the buyer has also led to installation of system that capture specific data that in the end is not used to either improve the performance of the machine or reduce operational costs.
Open Source
Open source software makes strides into Kenya's ICT sector
They are usually the work of developers who are more willing to design customised solutions for clients

Better design
According to analysts, open source tends to be better designed and more widely used because developers from different parts of the world, thanks to the Internet.

Kenya has emerged as a leader in the development of open source software, with several key software developers taking the lead.

Better quality
Open source software is usually developed by many developers, allowing for greater flexibility when it comes to support.

Better security
The advantage of open source is that once the source code is available, a good software developer can solve a bug in the software.

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Great reasons for Open Source…

• Improved security
It makes it easy to spot and fix vulnerabilities before they become open source doesn't mean that security is guaranteed.

• Customisable feature
It is not the software that the service to Install and customise which is what attracts buyers of the software.

• No vendor-lock in
With the source code available, a good software programmer can solve a bug for you without being restricted to one company.

• Better quality
Open source software is written by many developers who will work without the restrictions of a company setup which often limits creativity.

• Enhanced functionality
Once the right software is identified, a company can customise it to suit its needs and does not have to pay for periodic upgrades, which are costly.

There are very many lessons that can be learned from the not so successful telecentres

Kenya banks on Pasha Centres to make e-world relevant in the mass market

It must be more people that know that the first pilot of Pasha Centres, also known as Digital Villages championed by the ICT Board and its mother ministry, was launched last week in Kangundo. Despite the low key launch, it is believed this will be the beginning of an ambitious journey towards our envisaged information society.

The first time the term digital village was used was probably more than five years ago, but since then, the ICT Board and its Ministry have been grappling with this concept which kept on evolving and morphing. This was due to the expectation that was created by promoting the concept, which put both partners under immense pressure to deliver on the vision from all corners.

One oft-mentioned reason that the Board has continuous difficulty in putting into place the vision of Digital Villages is the fact that it continues to be less than visionary, which is being called the ‘open source model’.

It is important that Private sector firms decide to use open source solutions are often edited and do not in any way represent the views of this newspaper or its editors. (Image 1417x59 to 1575x174)

Bank website is a new website designed by a British firm.

The new website is simple and offers more relevant and useful content to the people they are intended to serve.

Another feature that is new is the search engine which allows the visitor to search for specific services.

The site is also conversant and trained in Microsoft Windows.

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DigitalBusiness

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There are very many lessons that can be learned from the not so successful telecentres.

It is also important to note that relevant local content cannot be substituted by state-of-the-art technology solutions

Kenya banks on Pancha Centres to make e-world relevant in the mass market

It is not that many people know that the first pilot of Pancha Centres, also known as Digital Villages championed by the Kenya ICT Board and its mother ministry, was launched last week in Kangundo. Despite the low key launch, I think this event heralds the beginning of an initiating journey towards our economic transformation society.

One of the reasons is that they are brand names - they have brand names and they're already established and they're already a part of the public. So they know the public.

There are many lessons that we can learn from the business of the past, since the objectives were almost similar.

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| (NB: Blog quotes that appear in this section are often edited and do not in any way represent the views of this newspaper or its editors.) |
Make way for the netbooks

The Aspire One is a netbook, the name given to a new line of laptops primarily used to allow Internet access.

Almost incredibly small in size - it can comfortably fit in an A4 envelope and is as big as a piece of paper folded in half - the typical reaction by potential buyers upon setting their caps on the Aspire One is: “but it’s so small!” Depending on your technological leanings, this can be either a good or bad thing. While the Acer Aspire One is just perfect if you don’t like bulky or heavy gadgets, if you should want to do anything more than surf the Internet or do some light office work, you may have a problem. The Aspire One is a netbook, the name given to a new line of laptops that primarily exist to allow their users to access the Internet and which have grown in popularity over the last year.

Light and ultra portable, netbooks usually tend to focus more on features that will enhance the web experience rather than the massive power harnessed by their notebook cousins. They have been tipped to kick off a market explosion in the next two years as user trends in the laptop segment shift to favour mobile users who want to access the web on the go. Worldwide shipments of netbooks are set to hit 35 million this year, rising to an estimated 139 million in 2013.

Price range (Sh) Sh20,000, available at most computer vendors.

**Tech De-mystified**

What is 3G?

3G simply refers to the third generation of mobile telephony technology. The third generation, as the name suggests, follows two earlier generations. The first generation (1G) began in the early 80’s with commercial deployment of mobile networks. Early networks used analog voice transmission, meaning you could only use the service for voice calls. The second generation (2G) emerged in the 90’s when mobile operators deployed two competing digital voice standards. In North America, some operators adopted Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) — which is currently offered by companies like Flashcom. CDMA allows for voice and data transmissions. But 3G commonly refers to what we know as the Global System for Mobile communication (GSM) standard, which came to Kenya in 2000 with the advent of mobile services by Safaricom and Zain (then KDDI). 2G allowed users to call, send SMS and perform other functions on phone.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) defined the third generation (3G) of mobile telephony standards to facilitate greater possibilities. For example, GSM could deliver not only voice, but also provided fast data. But to support mobile multimedia applications such as picture and video transmissions, 3G had to be developed. This lead to the establishment of 3G, which allows users on the network to surf the internet faster, send picture and videos to each other, and access services such as GPS as well as make voice calls. When a mobile provider says they offer 3G services, you should expect to be able to do the above activities using their network.

More advanced countries are in the process of developing 4G services, which would mean users could surf the internet and download more data faster, as well as transfer larger parcels of information using a simple SMS. The mobile communications comprise two steps: access to the mobile network, and access to the mobile services. Traditionally, these two steps are all controlled by one operator in a closed and proprietary way. In the 4G mobile era, the access to the mobile services will be evolved to an open Mobile Cloud so that it is fully open to any developers and providers. The mobile communications comprise two steps: access to the mobile network, and access to the mobile services. Traditionally, these two steps are all controlled by one operator in a closed and proprietary way. In the 4G mobile era, the access to the mobile services will be evolved to an open Mobile Cloud so that it is fully open to any developers and providers.

In this way, any non-wireless industries, such as Google, Microsoft, Oracle, SAP, GM, Bank of America can provide services for their mobile users. Of course, the operators are very reluctant to let go of this trend, but for the mobile users and the future global movement, it is just a matter of time ...

**INTERNET ACCESS**

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**NOKIA E75**

The Nokia E75 offers a compact design while managing to fit in a full QWERTY keyboard on a slide feature. Highlights include 3G connectivity, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and a 3.2-megapixel camera. A bit on the pricey side, the E75 offers the business users the choice of two keyboards - one internal and another external - that make typing a lot easier. The Nokia E75 is a nice alternative to the current crop of slate QWERTY messaging smartphones, offering a compact design without sacrificing the keyboard or e-mail capabilities.

Price range (Sh) 35,000 - 40,000