
Cabs come quicker by computer

An Ottawa taxi company is believed to be the first in North America to install a computer system which has cut in half response time to customer calls and has simplified dispatching operations. It is in use at the city's largest cab company, Blue Line Taxi.

Initially, Blue Line converted 100 of its 500 cabs to the new method (450 will be using it by late 1980) and the results from the first group have been described as "dramatic". In addition to reduced response time to customer calls, management is reporting more efficient use of its cabs.

D.S. Montgomery, President of Blue Line, who conceived the idea of automating the dispatch operations, asked Digital Methods Limited (DML) to transform it into reality. The taxi terminals are manufactured by Gandalf Data Communications Ltd. of Ottawa.

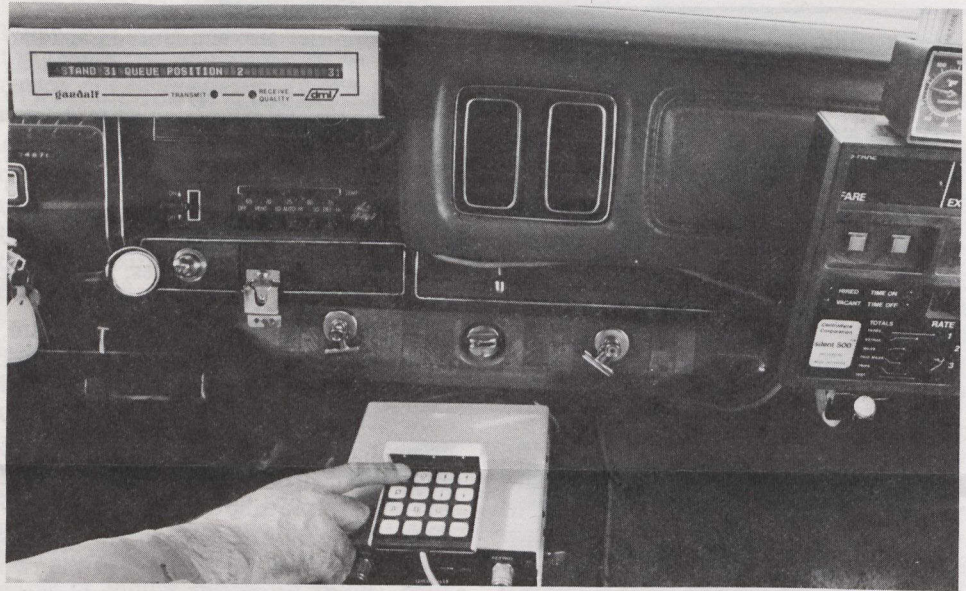
The system will, by the end of 1980, replace all voice communications in taxi dispatch, except for emergencies.

All automatic processing of customer calls is done by the computer, replacing a manual system which uses call-takers and dispatchers. In most cases, the manual method works well enough but in an operation the size of Blue Line, bottlenecks can develop. Last year, Blue Line handled close to 1,300,000 calls. During peak periods call-takers and dispatchers process about 1,000 calls an hour.

How it works

The computer dispatch system is currently designed to handle up to 1,500 dispatches an hour (10,000 calls daily) and can easily manage any peak period. Under the new system, call-takers will enter customer calls directly into the computer, using a display terminal. The computer prompts all the pertinent information, such as apartment number, while the customer is on the line. It validates the location, assigns a zone number, maintains a queue of available taxis, and dispatches the call to the cab at the top of the queue in one of 31 preselected "stands" or zones.

The entire cycle, from customer call-in to cab dispatch, takes only seconds compared to two to four minutes under conventional means. A beeper alerts the driver to a new message on his screen and he has 30 seconds to acknowledge the call. If no response is given, the call is



The computer dispatch system can handle 10,000 calls a day.

automatically re-assigned to another cab and the non-responding driver is placed at the bottom of the queue.

All communications go only to the selected cab rather than being broadcast to the entire fleet; radio tie-ups are becoming a thing of the past. A driver wishing to re-check an address of his fare need only press a button on his key pad and the address, which is stored in memory, re-appears on his terminal. Since the driver actually views the address rather than hearing it over a static-ridden radio, confusion over similar street names is eliminated.

New management capabilities

For management, simplified dispatching is only one of the benefits of the DML-developed system. Other advantages are significant cost savings, important new

fleet management capabilities and improved control over operations.

Last year, voice dispatch cost the firm \$50,000 for each of the three radio channels it operates seven days a week. By the time the conversion to computer is completed, it is estimated the company will save about \$100,000 annually.

Computer dispatch also enables Blue Line to make more efficient use of its cabs. The system is designed to give the supervisor all the flexibility he needs in dealing with a number of special situations (with computer dispatch, the supervisor can reserve, suspend, re-instate or give priority book-in to any taxi etc.)

At any time, the supervisor is able to monitor the loading on each stand and he can consolidate stands to adapt the fleet to changing business patterns due to time of day or changing weather conditions.

Canadian parks named international heritage sites

Dinosaur Provincial Park in southern Alberta has joined international heritage sites as a newly-announced member of the United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization world heritage list.

The park is unmatched in the world for the number and variety of high quality dinosaur specimens found there — 30 species in all. The discoveries represent every known group of dinosaurs living in an era marking the end of the age of reptiles. Moreover, the Badlands and the lush, diverse river environment in

the park provide habitat to a number of rare and endangered species.

Two other Canadian parks were among the first set of entries to the list in 1978 — Nahanni National Park in the Northwest Territories, a national wilderness area encompassing river canyons, hot springs, caves, lakes and glacial features, and L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Park in Newfoundland, renowned as the site of the oldest European settlement known to exist on this continent, and the only Norse settlement site found in North America.