

AS THE GLOBAL financial crisis deepens, business growth in general seems an unlikely prospect for most industry sectors. The South African commercial transport industry is no exception and fleet owners will have to invest in technologies that help streamline their operations in order to maximise profit margins says Mike Van der Merwe, director of Success-Meridian, a specialised fleet management systems provider based in Gauteng.

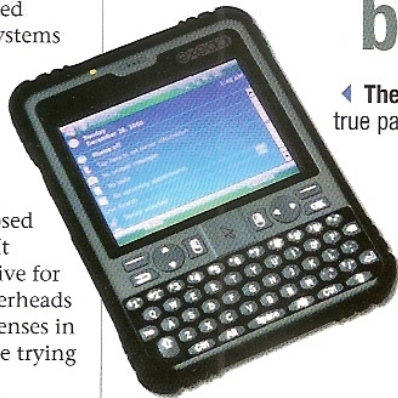
With the drop in consumer-spending, transport revenue has plummeted and many fleets have closed up shop," he says. "It has become imperative for fleets to cut their overheads and operational expenses in order to survive these trying times."

The rapid evolution of information and communications technology (ICT) has enabled increasingly accurate and comprehensive information to be transmitted between fleet vehicles and their home base. As true broadband technology embeds itself in South Africa, transport companies will seek enhanced levels of integration to improve reporting functionality while reducing hardware requirements, adds Van der Merwe.

"Road freight fleets want more efficient ways to manage the full spectrum of their logistics chain, from collection, to trip, to delivery signature. They not only want integrated reports but full, real-time visibility of their assets using in-vehicle video cameras, barcode scanners, swipe-card machines and electronic delivery verification tools. This is where the Meridian Exeda comes into its own, by giving road freight fleets all these features in



Smart-Phone boosts fleet



◀ **The Meridian Exeda** aims to introduce true paperless logistics management

one unit, with real-time reporting functionality."

Typically, most of these technologies are based on different hardware and software platforms making it difficult for fleet managers when it comes to comprehensive and concise reporting on all aspects of the operation, he adds.

"In tough times, no fleet can afford to suffer losses from vehicle abuse, pilfering and damage/loss of cargo or unwarranted insurance claims from a third party. The logistics chain from depot to customer and back has to become so transparent that every aspect of that mobile asset needs to be monitored using the most sophisticated technology available to transmit in real-time, not only data, but video and audio."

With over 20-years' experience in customised fleet management systems development, Success-Meridian has consolidated its niche client base of

long-haul and courier fleets through its dedication to customer service and innovation. With a focus on systems integration, the company has introduced a new handheld device called the Meridian Exeda.

"The Meridian Exeda is a smart-phone designed for enterprise applications using the latest mobile phone hardware and software technologies. Built by CompuLab in Israel and field-tested for 12 months locally, the device is modular in design and tailored to service specialised transport applications in South Africa," he says.

"The Meridian Exeda's functional content is identical to that of the latest generation of smart-phones, including the wireless, satellite and cellular connectivity found in today's devices. However, as a bona-fide logistics management tool, it is fully extensible and can manage a host of plug-in devices via a USB harness, like video cameras, barcode and RFID scanners and vehicle onboard computer/CANbus terminals. The data captured via these plug-in devices is transmitted via the unit's GPRS modem."

The Meridian Exeda has the flexibility to integrate conventional fleet

◀ **Real-time view** - an in-vehicle video camera can be plugged into the Meridian Exeda

management information with cargo security and logistics requirements in a single, portable communications device.

"The smart-phone is mounted in the cab and boasts a 520 MHz processor and 128 MB SDRAM. It can accommodate up to 24 GB of Flash memory and is equipped with a touch screen, microphone and speaker for safe use while driving. It also has a two-mega pixel camera with a flash which will prove invaluable when drivers need to capture proof of damaged cargo at collection points," Van der Merwe explains.

The GPS/WiFi/Bluetooth-enabled smart-phone comes with a choice of operating systems including Windows Mobile, Windows CE, Linux or Google's Android. It also has built-in satellite navigation, a full QWERTY keyboard and a battery life of 17 hours continuous use. The Meridian Exeda is shock-resistant but should a unit suffer damage, it is immediately replaced with a new one, says Van der Merwe.

"The Meridian Exeda introduces a truly paperless solution to logistics control. As a feature-rich mobile voice and text communications tool capable of storing and transmitting such a wide range of vital data, it brings real-time intelligence to fleet managers. In conjunction with Success-Meridian's fleet management software, precise implementation and user-training programmes, fleet owners can be confident of improved efficiencies from drivers, effectively cutting their vehicle costs while lowering their operational risk," concludes Van der Merwe. ◻