

“Blooming” Business Calls for Fresh Approach



Trackers help to ensure on-time deliveries of fresh-cut flowers on transportation provider's leased truck fleet

Background

Preparing for holiday demand

Fresh-cut flowers are perishable commodities used to commemorate a variety of occasions — from birthdays and weddings to anniversaries and funerals. The demand for flowers grows exponentially during the Valentine's Day and Mother's Day holidays, which places a temporary strain on the perishable supply chain to increase volumes and maintain freshness throughout the transportation process.

Headquartered in Palm City, Fla., Armellini Logistics (Armellini) is an expert in the transportation of fresh-cut flowers. Throughout the year, Armellini ships a variety of floral products for its wholesaler customers across most of the continental U.S. As an asset-based carrier, Armellini has more than 200 less-than-truckload (LTL) trucks in its fleet at any given time. But to meet the volume spikes during the Valentine's Day and Mother's Day holidays, the company leases approximately 100 additional carriers for short-term, 10-day periods.

According to Rosanna Winningham, Armellini's director of corporate services and customer service lead, this had become a standard — but necessary — practice. “Hiring outside carriers is our solution to maintaining our customer service levels during peak periods. It's extremely important for these leased trucks to make deliveries on time and to keep flowers at the proper temperature ranges,” she said.

Challenge

Unlike Armellini's asset-based fleet, the temporarily leased trucks did not have tracking technologies that allowed their logistics team to monitor the estimated times of arrival (ETAs) and temperatures of in-transit shipments. To keep track of ETAs during these high-volume holidays, Winningham said her team resorted to “old school” methods.

“For all of the lease operator trucks on the road during the holiday rush, we had to make phone calls twice a day to find out where they were and to make sure they are still on target for customer delivery,” Winningham said.

In some cases, the company would install rudimentary recorders to validate temperatures in select shipping trucks. But in the many instances where these devices were not returned, logistics teams had no supporting documentation to counter customer claims.

Another persistent challenge they face is the growing driver shortage within the trucking industry. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, Winningham said that some of Armellini's asset-based drivers sought solo driving opportunities while others opted to retire from driving. “We rely on two-person

continued on page 2

teams, which allow one driver to sleep while the other drives. With trips lasting four to five days, many of these drivers no longer wanted to be in an enclosed space with each other,” she said.

In addition, with cut flowers perceived as a luxury commodity, Armellini executives made a strategic decision to hedge against market volatility and expand their shipping operations to other products. Not only has Armellini been forced to leverage more leased trucks year-round to help offset the driver shortage, but it also has started to include other perishables in their LTL customer mix.

Solution

Enabling visibility to in-transit leased truck shipments

Facing this dynamic mix of market conditions, Armellini needed a way to monitor delivery ETAs and validate the shipping temperatures of its expanding leased truck fleet and perishable product lines. In 2018, Winningham said her team began working with Emerson to gain visibility to its leased trucks during the two annual floral peak demand periods.

Emerson advised Armellini to install its GO real-time 2G trackers on their leased trucks and leverage its companion Oversight software portal. This immediately put an end to Armellini’s manual practice of placing frequent phone calls to each truck driver for delivery status. Instead, logistics teams now simply monitor in-transit shipment locations and temperatures using the cloud-based Oversight portal.

Over the past few years, many cellular 2G networks have become obsolete in various regions throughout the U.S. and around the globe, which can cause blind spots in tracking visibility. Winningham said that when her team started to experience these intermittent visibility issues in 2020, they upgraded to the newer GO real-time 4G/5G trackers. In addition to upgrading to these new devices, the team was able to integrate Oversight location data into their own logistics monitoring system.

Result

Achieving on-time deliveries and temperature certainty

Winningham said that the customer service team and customers alike have experienced multiple benefits of the Emerson tracking and monitoring solution. For her internal team, the ability to see the location of shipments at any given moment and receive real-time notifications of temperature excursions has greatly improved their overall customer service efficiencies. “Visibility to our leased truck fleet has improved from 10% to now more than 90%,” she said.

For Armellini’s customers, the integration of Oversight with their internal system gives them online visibility to track their own delivery ETAs. “For customers that use this feature, they’re no longer relying on us to tell them when to expect their deliveries,” Winningham said.

The optimal temperature for cut flowers is between 36 and 38 °F; temperatures below 36 °F will cause them to freeze and temperatures above 50 °F will cause them distress or accelerate blooming. Having a temperature monitoring and data logging program has delivered significant product quality benefits. Winningham said her team uses this data to ensure products are kept at proper temperatures and provide documentation to help resolve customer disputes.

“When we see a problem with a shipment’s temperature, we’re able to take corrective actions to ensure our customers receive only the best quality products. In claims situations, we’re able to pull up the in-transit temperature data log to verify that any quality problems didn’t happen on our watch,” she said.



Oversight and Oversight Mobile