Switching taxi booking systems – 7 questions to ask when evaluating a new software provider

In the private hire and taxi industry the provider of booking and dispatch software plays a key role in a company's success. Having in place a consistent, formalised system for evaluating the alternatives and making the final selection is essential to achieving operational success and profitability.

But how do you sort through the marketing and sales hype and how can you tell which vendor is right for your business and will act as a true partner in your commercial success? What questions should you ask and what answers will help you to establish whether one particular vendor solution best fits your particular needs now and in the future?

Whether you are looking to switch booking and dispatch software vendors or start using the technology for the first time, the following 8 tips will help you to effectively rate competing suppliers.

#1. Establish what it is you really want.

Knowing what is required of the software at the outset of the evaluation process - ideally split into a "must have" list and a "nice to have" list - will help you to develop a consistent and thorough assessment. The overall goals of the business as well as the different requirements of the stakeholders should also be captured within a survey format. This will strategically align you and you will be able to narrow down your search. Some criteria matter more than others so implement a points system to the criteria you select; once you have viewed the presentation of each vendor, you will be able to compare and contrast each proposal side by side based on the points given.

Equally, decide which the red flags are, and therefore deserving of a negative score, as you evaluate a vendor's presentation. A bad supplier will provide you with a mediocre or poor system and services and cause problems for your drivers and customers long term.

#2. What is the software pricing model?

The cost of software can be determined in many ways but the simplest – particularly in cloud-based services - it to charge per user (or per vehicle in the case of the taxi and limousine industries). Most vendors will have a minimum license purchase requirement and fixed up-front cost to configure your system. You will be embarking on a relationship that hopefully last years so likewise, a long-term view of the contract should be taken, ensuring that all costs and fees are outlined fully, such as training, software updates and maintenance in addition to the monthly subscription.

#3. Will it scale?

The goal of most businesses is to grow, whether this is to scale up (the ability to handle growing amounts of work from your existing area) or scale out (running your operations iteratively in new geographical markets). As companies expand into new markets (or grow), their software should be

able to scale accordingly. If designed right, the solution you choose will provide the necessary level of scalability to suit your ambitions and support more bookings and more contact centre operators when required.

Your technological platform must therefore have the power to serve the required number of bookings adequately without becoming sluggish or un-responsive so you should understand the level of customisation and scalability a software solution offers.

#4. Communication.

Communication is crucial in any relationship but more so in the partnership with your technology provider. Your potential provider is a key service to your operation so should provide ready access to a skilled team of customer support professionals – either via the phone, online chat, email or web portal - to help you get onboard and then keep your operations running smoothly.

#5. Industry knowledge

When the founders have "lived" the problem first-hand and built their software with those pain points in mind it will ensure the system is targeted to your particular use. Vendors that understand how successful private hire operators, whatever their size, have overcome their challenges will be in a better position to know your needs and how your business operates.

#6. Research & Development

Assess each vendor for the level of innovation that they offer. A lot can be (and has been) written about the innovative mindset, but this needs to be ingrained in the company's culture and structures and is further evidenced by the actual features developed over time. Taxi booking and dispatch software needs to be very feature rich and a single system with tens of thousands of features is not uncommon. If you require your system to have particular features or customsation you should evaluate each vendor for their ability to develop new features and any costs involved. Some software vendors use add-ons as a way to make more money so check what the bottom line cost is and whether their pricing structure is related to the features you take.

The ability to research, develop and innovate requires a great deal of money and resource. It is also crucial as you must continually improve your current service offering while also developing new service extensions in your business model in order to remain competitive. A good test is to see the company's R&D road map with questions such as, what the vendor's most recent products are, and what new products it plans to issue in the coming months.

Generally, your technology supplier should be able to demonstrate it can help make your business more efficient, keep drivers loyal, maintain relevance to customers and has exciting new products and services in its R&D pipeline.

#7. Do their industry credentials check out?

When you are trying to minimize deployment risk it can be comforting to know that similar implementations have taken place successfully with firms of similar size and challenges. Look for relevant examples and proof from third parties and customer references rather than anecdotal

evidence. Most private hire operators today are trying to solve the same business challenges, so understanding how your potential vendor's current customers are doing this can be helpful.

Always ask: How long has the vendor been in business? How long have they been selling this software system? When was the software first developed? How many local and international customers do they have? Is their company growing?

There's no substitute for getting appraisals directly from your peers in the private hire industry. In checking out references provided by the vendor, keep the following in mind:

- Site visits are preferable to phone calls or e-mail exchanges.
- Ask to see the software in action and get feedback from frontline users in various roles;
- Verify that your contacts do not have a vested interest in the product beyond a client-vendor relationship (i.e. are not stakeholders or resellers).
- Ask specific questions about the vendor and software using your vendor survey;

Conclusion

Companies that embrace their software supplier, viewing them as partners in helping them to grow the business, will typically benefit more from smoother operations, growth in bookings and more drivers. The solution is vendor due diligence.

Autocab is pleased to provide this **Vendor Evaluation Checklist** to anyone looking to purchase a taxi booking and dispatch system.