

Trip Planning Versus Technology-Are You Compromising Your Safety?

We are having a good winter in my local area, but that may be a quite different scene somewhere else across our Continent. This is why your trip planning efforts cannot end once you depart from your destination. I recently watched some videos on social media that totally amazed me. Trucks, cars, and other road users piling into each other in snowy conditions on a major Interstate. What was worse was that there was already a multi-vehicle accident on the same highway and people were driving right into the accident at high rates of speed. This appalled me even with my twenty-five years of driving experience. With all the technology in our lives how come we are so ill-informed to what is going on ahead of us on the roadways?

Technology as much as it is great for our lives and how we do things these devices are also making us stupid. This is nothing new, it has been documented on the news and in many reports. When was the last time you had to remember a phone number? For most of us technology has been very helpful in our day to day activities, but for some occupations technology may be compromising your safety. This is especially true for truck drivers.

The creation of GPS Units has caused more accidents since they have been the main source of trip planning for most new drivers. The use of cell phones and satellite communications are now the main ways that most drivers communicate with their dispatchers. Everything is done without speaking today. When people need to speak to each other they call on the phone as many drivers are wearing a bluetooth device while driving. This technology may keep you in contact with the office or dispatch, but is it putting you in danger?

The GPS has stopped people planning their trips ahead of time. They just set the address, pull out of the parking lot, and head out on the highway. Turn left, turn right, and they are on their way. There is no concept of looking at the route as a whole to the destination. What is the terrain like? Does your route take you close to lakes and rivers that may affect weather patterns? Will you be going through the mountains? What type of weather may you encounter along the way? These questions are all part of proper trip planning techniques and something every driver should be doing before they depart on a trip. But it doesn't stop there? I know that the GPS can help with many of the questions stated above, but on the road things change quickly and it won't tell you everything.

Trip planning doesn't stop once you depart from the shipping point. Technology may be great for communicating with the office, but the office isn't in the same location as you are or even better five miles up the road. Proper trip planning is continual, just like a game of checkers or chess. When your opponent makes a play then you have to make a play to counter the one made before. You can't just say to yourself my goal is to get my King to the other side and focus only on moves that will attain that without addressing what your opponent will do. You would never make it. With every move you need to readjust your thinking and possibly change the thought process on your next move. Trip planning is the same, your plan may have been to travel down a certain highway because it was the best route to reach your destination. If you are not monitoring conditions ahead of you you may end up being delayed by an accident or encounter dangerous conditions due to bad weather. If you are monitoring conditions ahead you can decide on alternate routes that may be safer or allow you to miss that major traffic jam.

Your safety is of the utmost importance and monitoring the road ahead may be the factor that makes that happen. Lets go back to the videos on social media that I talked about in the

beginning of this article. Assuming that the drivers on that snowy highway were monitoring conditions properly they would have been able to evaluate their actions. First, as conditions deteriorate the drivers had the visual clue that they may need to change their route or possibly stop until conditions improve. That is the visual clue. The second issue is knowing what is happening ahead of you. The C.B (Citizen Band) radio for the most part gave you five miles of warning of what was going on ahead of you. I realize there may not be an exit or place to stop within five miles, but if there is a major accident ahead there are ways of slowing down traffic and avoiding a mass pile up. The trick is you have to know there is a problem up ahead. For professional drivers the radio is one way of getting that information. I am told by many drivers on the road today that drivers are not using their C.B., if they have one in their truck at all. If you don't have a radio other ways of monitoring local conditions may be finding a local news station, watching other road users in the opposite direction that may be trying to give warning signs by flashing lights and so on. Trip planning never stops until you arrive at your destination.

There have been too many videos out with incidents like the one I referred to above. I realize not everyone can be stopped but many incidents can be avoided or at least reduced in the damage done. Over my years driving keeping the radio on low at all times has kept me alert to changing road conditions and saved me many times. I agree there is a lot of crap that comes over the radio and you can't trust everything you hear. In bad conditions it may just save your life, it has saved mine.

About the Author

Bruce Outridge has been in the transportation industry for over 30 years and is author of the books *Running By The Mile* and *Driven to Drive* among others. He is the host of *The Lead Pedal Podcast* and a trainer and speaker in the industry. You can learn more about Bruce and his work at www.bruceoutridge.com