



MIKE ALBERT

The Definitive Guide to Exceptional Fleet Management

FLEET SOLUTIONS



Exceptional Fleet Management: It's a Rare Thing

Like most complicated and challenging activities in life, fleet management can be performed on a scale from poor to average to exceptional. This guide offers some insights and handy checklists to help determine if your approach to fleet management is all it can be.

In the second part of this guide, we'll explore what makes a truly exceptional Fleet Management Companies (FMC)—and how to evaluate which one would make the best partner for you and your fleet.



The Key Components of Fleet Management

MAINTENANCE MANAGEMENT

What It Is & Why It's Important

Every vehicle requires ongoing maintenance--and between the technological advancement of vehicles and the increased demand for qualified mechanics, vehicle maintenance costs are rising. A comprehensive maintenance management program can help you gain control of costs while ensuring the quality of service.

Common Mistakes

Though maintenance is one of the most fundamental elements of fleet management, it's also one where mistakes are common. For example, not using ASE-certified technicians could result in improper or incomplete repairs. Another common mistake is not relying on experts to make decisions around non-routine maintenance based on a vehicle's data and history, leading to unnecessary or ill-timed repairs. Other common errors include not making it easy for drivers to schedule maintenance and making them pay cash out of pocket for repairs. Finally, you want a maintenance solution where you pay as you go versus paying a flat service fee, as this almost always results in higher costs in the long run.

What Exceptional Maintenance Management Looks Like

- You take a pay-as-you-go approach to maintenance.
- You rely on a network of ASE-certified maintenance partners.
- You offer a driver-friendly app to schedule appointments with approved service partners.
- You never require your drivers to pay out of their own pockets.
- You invest in a preventive maintenance program to maximize uptime, control costs, and protect the longevity of your vehicles.
- You make decisions on non-routine maintenance based on a vehicle's data and history.
- You rely on predictive analytics to proactively manage your maintenance program.
- You access an app that makes it easy to stay up-to-date on scheduled maintenance.
- You have the peace of mind of 24/7 roadside assistance and towing options.
- You have access to best-in-industry maintenance shops and mobile services.
- You receive priority attention at the maintenance shops.
- You conduct price shopping and negotiations to determine the most cost-effective fix on major repairs; you decline unnecessary or poorly timed ones.
- You receive itemized invoices to see exactly what your maintenance costs accomplished.

VEHICLE ACQUISITION

What It Is & Why It's Important

When you own an entire fleet, you need to manage more than just your vehicles' maintenance issues. The key to a profitable fleet is appropriately managing your vehicles throughout their life cycle—and doing the math to minimize the costs of licensing, insurance, maintenance, administration, accidents, and more. And that can be a daunting task. The goal is to acquire your vehicles as affordably and hassle-free as possible by customizing a funding strategy that perfectly aligns with your financial goals and risk strategy. After all, choices here can impact financial metrics such as cash flow and EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization) for years. Exceptional vehicle acquisition also entails evaluating the pros and cons of acquiring vehicles from local dealers or directly from OEMs—as well as knowing exactly when to remarket or dispose of a vehicle.

Common Mistakes

A standard error here is not evaluating vehicles through the lens of your business goals, when the two should be closely linked. Similarly, it's a common mistake to acquire vehicles with price as the only metric or accept a second-best vehicle choice to save a few dollars in the short term. Another common misstep is not considering the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) of each vehicle you evaluate. Lastly, a popular error is not cycling out vehicles at the proper time, driving your TCO upward.

What Exceptional Vehicle Acquisition Looks Like

- Your unique financing needs are established by assessing your current fleet vehicles and their utilization while considering your industry, operations, and budgeting factors.
- Your specific business goals shape the lease type, terms, and rates.
- Your vehicle selection is also shaped by your goals, such as controlling fuel and maintenance costs, improving driver retention and safety, reducing carbon footprint with alternative fuels and EVs, or exploring the future of autonomous fleet vehicles.
- You have options to optimize cash flow and minimize your TCO.
- Your lease terms are matched to actual driving habits, allowing you to only pay for the portion of the vehicle you use.
- You acquire assets that will achieve lower variable costs with a higher resale value.
- Your acquisition solution improves metrics such as cash flow and EBITDA.
- Your vehicles are replaced at the optimal time to reduce maintenance costs and maximize safety, productivity, brand image, and resale value.
- Your vehicles are delivered to your drivers to reduce downtime.



VEHICLE UPFITTING

What It Is & Why It's Important

Vehicle upfitting optimizes your crew's productivity by ensuring their primary tool (their vehicle) works harder for them due to special features such as shelving, racks, and the like. A strategically specified vehicle and a well-planned upfit will boost your driver's performance, improve your customers' experience, and reduce the cost of your fleet.

Common Mistakes

The best upfits are often a mix of standard and custom solutions to accomplish specific goals. Be wary of solutions that are too standard or too customized—the first may not be as effective as you need it to be, and the second may make using the vehicle for other business purposes difficult. Another common mistake is attempting a DIY upfit; untrained installers risk damaging the vehicle and potentially negating part of the warranty.

What Exceptional Upfitting Looks Like

- You have access to one-on-one upfit consultations at multiple locations.
- You invest in solutions that address your specific situation.
- Your upfit engineers understand your day-to-day fleet vehicle usage with a truck team ride-along.
- Your vehicles are sent to vetted upfitters to ensure the right equipment is installed correctly.
- You have access to a broad network of OEMs and trusted vendors.
- You benefit from turnkey service of custom van upfits and truck engineering that are ready to roll upon delivery.
- Your vehicles are appropriately branded and in full compliance with your brand equity.

DID YOU KNOW?

A strategically specified vehicle and a well-planned upfit will optimize your driver's performance, improve your customer's experience, and reduce the cost of your fleet.



TELEMATICS

What It Is & Why It's Important

As a business owner, finding yourself vulnerable to the overall impact of accidents, fuel costs, maintenance, and safety can be an unpleasant experience. Fleet telematics offers transparency into the where, when, and how of your assets' daily use so you can stay two steps ahead of your fleet's challenges. Otherwise, you're flying blind.

The good news is that fleets of any size can benefit from customized fleet telematics solutions. With the technology that comes standard in most new vehicles, it's easier than ever to tap into your fleet vehicle data to identify actionable insights and make a meaningful impact on your business. Another benefit of telematics is that, with insurance rates skyrocketing, the data can help you negotiate better terms.

Common Mistakes

The biggest mistake is not using telematics at all. Why go with your gut when data can provide a precise picture of your situation and lead you to evidence-backed solutions? Another common mistake is using telematics but letting the data overwhelm you versus guiding you to more informed fleet decisions that save you time and money while improving safety.

What Exceptional Telematics Looks Like:

- You can access a simple-to-use interface with a customizable dashboard that tells you exactly what you need to know.
- You extract actionable insights from your fleet data.
- You use data to gain insight into drivers' behavior to reduce speeding and unnecessary idling that impact fuel costs, track fuel consumption and mileage to help detect engine issues affecting MPG, and reduce after-hours usage.
- You allow the data to help you evaluate each vehicle's performance and to identify potential mechanical or system anomalies.
- You track vehicle and customer locations to enable you to dispatch the best driver for the job; trip history information gives you insight into time spent at visited locations and the route taken, allowing you to optimize routes.
- You improve safety by receiving risk and safety reports, getting instant accident notifications, and monitoring seat belt use.
- You provide driver safety scorecards.

FUEL MANAGEMENT

What It Is & Why It's Important

Fuel is one of the top expenses of any fleet. In addition to the increasing cost of fuel itself, fraud at the pump is rising. Nonfuel purchases are a growing concern, as well as improper fuel grade usage. Implementing a managed fuel program with the correct fuel card can mitigate these issues and optimize fuel use across your fleet.

Common Mistakes

Fuel consumption can be costlier than expected when not adequately managed. A common mistake is not tracking fuel usage to understand a vehicle's true TCO. A proper fuel management program can also eliminate pesky paper receipts and time-consuming reimbursement forms.

What Exceptional Fuel Management Looks Like

- You have fleet fuel cards—assigned to specific vehicles—for drivers to use at the pump.
- You benefit from centralized billing and a consolidated invoice.
- You're eligible for fuel perks, such as rebates.
- You receive cost-per-mile and miles-per-gallon analyses to inform how your vehicles are performing.
- You gain valuable insights into vehicle health and driver habits through data points such as odometer readings, fuel spend, fuel grade selection, etc.

TOLL MANAGEMENT

What It Is & Why It's Important

Routes with tollways can increase fleet costs dramatically. The right fleet toll management program, however, can streamline the driver's experience, simplify administrative tasks, and even reduce toll expenses by up to fifty percent.

Common Mistake

A typical error is not creating the conditions where your drivers can go anywhere in your operating areas and negotiate the tolls—at speed—thanks to technology such as transponders and video tolling. Not doing so risks costly tolling citations. It also means drivers must slow down, wait in line, and then pay cash. This wastes time and frustrates drivers, negatively impacting morale.

What Exceptional Toll Management Looks Like

- Your drivers have access to high-speed, cashless toll lanes.
- You enjoy the most thorough toll coverage in all your operating areas.
- Your toll expenses are centralized in one program for easier reporting and monitoring.
- You benefit from a dramatic decrease in toll citations, if not a total eradication.

One big mistake is not investing in safety and collision management and, instead simply crossing your fingers and hoping for no accidents.

SAFETY & COLLISION MANAGEMENT

What It Is & Why It's Important

The open road and all the variations in driver behavior that come with it can present serious risks for the safety of your drivers and fleet vehicles. Prioritizing safety and effectively mitigating risks on the road can prevent costly accidents that can hurt people, damage property, and impact your bottom line.

Common Mistakes

One of the biggest mistakes here is not investing in safety and collision management and simply crossing your fingers and hoping for the best. Another big mistake is not reviewing Motor Vehicle Reports (MVRs) to ensure that your company's liabilities are kept to a minimum. (Many MVR management systems only check drivers' records once a year, increasing the chances that you have out-of-policy drivers operating your vehicles.) Yet another error is not using the safety data at your disposal to improve your drivers' skills through ongoing, personalized training.

What Exceptional Safety & Collision Management Looks Like

- You conduct regular, in-depth reviews of your fleet to help you make cost-saving decisions, such as which vehicles to service before potential breakdowns create a hazard.
- You provide driver safety training shaped by vehicle and driver behavior data, allowing for a comprehensive solution that helps reduce risk, boost safety, and protect your finances.
- You receive administrative accident support to ensure repair costs stay controlled and savings are maximized with subrogation recovery.
- You use MVRs to provide an in-depth look at your drivers' and vehicles' behaviors so you know where to address concerns that could cause accidents.
- You analyze fleet data to preemptively spot risks and improve safety.
- You have a comprehensive safety policy that you carefully review with each driver. In addition, drivers always have easy access to the policy via an app.

DOT COMPLIANCE

What It Is & Why It's Important

If you have Commercial Motor Vehicles (CMVs) in your fleet, those vehicles, as well as their drivers, must adhere to stringent Department of Transportation (DOT) regulations. You'll want to ensure they meet all requirements to avoid costly violations and maximize safety.

Common Mistakes

Mistakes in this area include handling compliance in a "one-off" manner and forgoing the benefits of a more comprehensive and efficient approach. Another error is not proactively managing DOT numbers, International Registration Plans (IRPs), and the International Fuel Tax Agreement (IFTA).

What Exceptional Compliance and Registration Looks Like

- You obtain fleet permits for mileage, authority, IFTA, and IRP; monitor renewals; coordinate details with states; acquire overweight/over-dimensional permits; stay aware of expiration dates and use taxes.
- You audit concerns, GPS data, and changing regulations to keep atop fuel tax reporting; you collect and manage your ongoing mileage and fuel data and correct any errors to meet IFTA and IRP requirements. You also submit accurate tax returns with the appropriate jurisdictions.
- You reduce risk exposure by managing all the documentation needed for driver qualifications, service hours, vehicle inspections, Compliance, Safety & Accountability (CSA) records, roadside and accident reports, and other safety metrics.
- You keep your fleet running safely and entirely within the law with customized consulting, training, and compliance services.

VEHICLE REGISTRATION

What It Is & Why It's Important

Properly registering your fleet vehicles with state DMVs is necessary, but it can be a full-time job. Renewal criteria can vary from state to state, city to city, and even county to county—and failure to adhere to regulations can result in costly fines.

Common Mistakes

A widespread mistake in vehicle registration is handling it in a decentralized manner without the help of software to notify you of renewals or required inspections. Another common error is delegating the responsibility of registration to your drivers, which can take up valuable time from their schedules.

What Exceptional Compliance and Registration Looks Like

- You take care of registration renewals for your drivers in every state you operate within.
- You receive one monthly consolidated invoice detailing your entire fleet's registration fees.
- You have visibility into registration compliance with a finger stroke on a keyboard.
- You avoid late fees by being notified 90+ days before tags are due to expire.
- You increase productivity by eliminating the need for your drivers to wait in line at the DMV and free up hours your fleet administrator would otherwise spend sorting through receipts and expense reports and dealing with past-due license plates and registration renewals.

You'll want to ensure to meet all Department of Transportation regulations to avoid costly violations and maximize safety.

Common Themes in Exceptional Fleet Management

When you examine the lists above that capture the elements of exceptional fleet management, several themes emerge:

DATA: We live in a digital world that offers an abundance of vehicle and driver data to make your fleet better and safer. Any fleet management approach that doesn't lean-hard-on data is nowhere near exceptional.

CUSTOMIZATION: No two companies are the same. No two fleets are the same. No two vehicles are the same. As such, exceptional fleet management constantly searches for the best solution given the precise circumstances. For instance, one leasing approach may be perfect for one company but problematic for another. In exceptional fleet management, the details matter—a lot.

EASE & EFFICIENCIES: Exceptional fleet management seeks the most efficient solutions that lighten your burden while improving your fleet's performance.

The Benefits of Partnering with an FMC

A Fleet Management Company (FMC) specializes in the strategic management of commercial fleets, partnering with businesses or government agencies to manage some or all aspects of their fleet program. The right FMC will take the time to listen to your specific needs, understand your current fleet operations, and then work with you to develop a highly customized plan to meet your goals. The benefits of working with an FMC include:

- They have a diverse OEM network with established partnerships and bulk ordering incentives.
- They're experts in all aspects of fleet operations, including financing, vehicle acquisition, upfit, maintenance, telematics, licensing & registration, etc.
- They offer specialized technology to track metrics and provide access to industry KPIs and data-driven insights for ongoing operational improvements.
- They can benchmark client data against 3rd party data to identify red flags and opportunities for savings.
- They offer a centralized fleet management system, with all vehicle information in one place, allowing administration efforts to be streamlined.

Choosing the Right FMC Partner

Not all FMCs are created equal. Not all will lead you to exceptional fleet management. So, how do you select the right one to partner with? Ask these questions:

- Does the FMC offer “hands-on” customer service? Will you have a dedicated relationship manager? Will they go above and beyond if necessary? In other words, will the FMC deliver customer service that is proactive, attentive, responsive, and personalized?
- Does the FMC have extensive experience across industries, fleet sizes, and geographies?
- Does the FMC fully grasp the intricacies of fleet data, which is critical to exceptional fleet management?
- Does the FMC offer personalized solutions reflecting your unique situation (e.g., fleet size, vehicle type(s), industry, geography, etc.)?
- Does the FMC offer fleet tools to help you grow, such as centralized fleet data for easy access, solutions to help drivers maximize their time, and easy-to-use data dashboards so you can get essential data without digging for it?
- Do you get a clear sense that partnering with the FMC will represent an immediate and meaningful step forward? Have they given you clear and concrete specifics about how they intend to help you continue to grow year over year? Are they planning for your future by, for example, devising vehicle procurement plans to mitigate supply chain effects?

If you're looking for exceptional fleet management, look no more

At Mike Albert Fleet Solutions, custom data analysis, vast first-hand knowledge, and unmatched personal service unite to create something truly exceptional. Fleet Science® guides us, our proprietary approach that combines data with “aha!” insights that meaningfully improve overall fleet performance. Our dedicated Client Partnership Managers (CPMs) provide concierge-level service that's unmatched in the industry. You can think of them as the “people behind the data.” Exceptional fleet management is, indeed, a rare thing. But you'll find it at Mike Albert Fleet Solutions.

Ready to move your fleet forward? Contact us on mikealbert.com.

FIND OUT MORE

Want to know more about exceptional fleet management? Here's a list of helpful resources to bone up on everything from telematics to upfitting and more.

[The Fleet Studies Lab](#)

[Automotive Fleet Magazine](#)

[NAFA: The Fleet Management Association](#)

[Automotive Fleet Leasing Association \(AFLA\)](#)

[Women in Fleet Management Mentorship Program and Resources](#)

