



Sim training pays, DriveWise numbers suggest

By James Menzies

BARRIE, Ont. – The use of driving simulators to train new and current truck drivers is still a relatively new concept in Canada, but some numbers are beginning to emerge that would suggest the benefits of sim training far outweigh the costs.

Barrie, Ont.-based DriveWise has been heavily promoting the use of simulators as a training tool in the trucking industry. The company, which is the Canadian distributor of the L3 MPRI simulator, provides customized sim training programs for truck fleets and training institutions.

The company has emphatically insisted sim training provides the highest available rate of learning retention while also delivering the biggest bang for the training buck. Now it says it has the numbers to prove it.

“It’s a new concept and (fleets) see it as a chunk of money that’s going out,” explains Lesley de Repentigny, president and CEO of DriveWise. “Yes, it is initially, but it’s going to pale in comparison to the amount that comes back in the long run.”

The biggest return on investment comes in the form of accident reductions and improved driving habits according to studies which have been completed south of the border.

One of the top five US carriers conducted an experiment whereby its Georgia-based drivers were trained on simulators in 2004. When it compared those drivers’ post-training records to four other regions, those who received the sim training were the only group to reduce their accident rates. Crashes – and crashes per million miles – were down significantly among the sim-trained drivers while accident rates climbed in the regions where sim training wasn’t provided, the company reported.



HANDS-ON: *Truck News* editor James Menzies tries his hand at DriveWise’s L3 MPRI simulator.

“You can bet your bottom dollar that carrier will be doing sim training in all those other areas,” says Alan Masters of DriveWise.

Another study, involving five carriers, showed they collectively reduced their crashes by 36% following training on the simulators. Repentigny said the simulator helped drivers improve space management, which is a factor in 80% of crashes.

And then there’s the major bottling company in the US which trained 426 of its drivers on the simulator at a cost of \$400 per driver. Somehow the safety manager convinced the company to shell out US\$170,400 for the experiment but he likely received a few pats on the back when the results were tallied.

Accident costs down

In the 18 months prior to sim training, the company suffered \$11,257,568 in costs related to accidents. In the 18 months following the training, accident costs totaled just \$5,101,370 for a reduction of more than \$6 million or 55%.

The value proposition of sim training is one that is taking some carriers a while to wrap their

heads around, admits Masters. He says Canada lags behind the US when it comes to acceptance while the European trucking industry is about 25 years ahead of the curve.

“Sim training is taking off in the US,” says Masters, adding major fleets such as Schneider National and JB Hunt have been employing the training method. “But talking to some big fleets up here, they don’t know anything about it.”

Truck simulators aren’t cheap. They cost upwards of \$200,000 but DriveWise will visit carriers with a mobile unit and provide training on-site for as little as \$250 per driver. There are a number of advantages over traditional training methods, says Repentigny.

“You can control the variables in the operational environment,” she explains. “You can assess their ability to handle negative weather and other negative situations.”

The trainer can alter everything from weather conditions to the way four-wheelers behave around the truck to see how the driver reacts to various scenarios in a controlled environment.

Tire blowouts, air brake failures

and other mechanical situations can also be simulated – not exactly an option during a traditional road test.

Another advantage of sim training is that all the variables can be customized for a particular fleet.

“If a bunch of drivers are coming back with damage because there’s a loading dock in Indiana that’s causing problems, we can recreate the dock that’s causing them problems,” points out Masters.

National Training Laboratories has found that average retention levels vary from 5% during lectures to 75% when actually performing an activity such as driving a simulator.

Reduced training costs

“You increase what they retain because they know they have to demonstrate what they have learned,” says Repentigny.

She estimates using sim training can actually reduce a traditional training budget by 40%.

A cost comparison conducted by DriveWise shows a recurrency training program for 40 drivers that traditionally cost \$17,173 can be completed for \$9,600 when involving a blended learning program that involves a simulator.

Masters adds that four hours on the sim is the equivalent of eight hours in truck time since a trainee can leap right into a driving situation without dealing with pre-trip inspections, fueling up, etc.

“It takes a lot of time just to get the thing out on the road,” he says of a traditional truck.

DriveWise is hoping more Canadian carriers will see the benefits of sim training for themselves.

With an industry leader such as Schneider National recently announcing it’s purchasing 55 simulators to train its 16,000 drivers, it may only be a matter of time. □