

BY D. GAIL FLEENOR

Staying on top of the latest fuel-management technology is time well spent for marketers

GETTING REAL

TECHNOLOGY IN THE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY SEEMS TO change as fast as fuel prices. Imagine a computer “dashboard” filled with all the up-to-date information needed to purchase fuel at the best price available, remote control software to access dozens of station inventories in real time, systems to reconcile every gallon of gasoline — all these options are available to marketers today.

In today’s competitive times, marketers who keep up with the latest technology can drive more dollars to the bottom line. *NPN Magazine* contacted a variety of companies for a sample of what’s new and what’s popular in fuel-management technology:

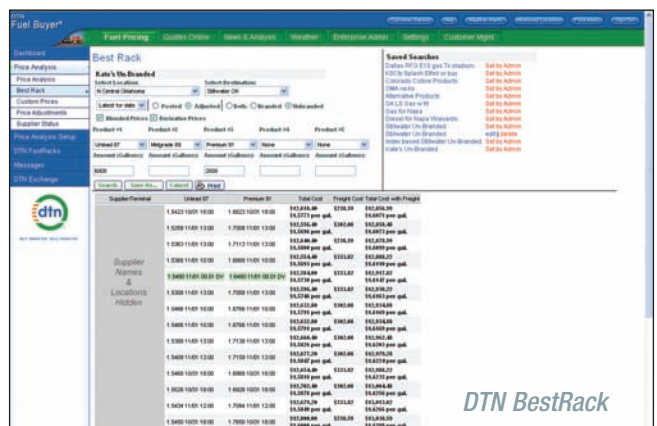
DTN

The “dashboard” view of DTN’s new Fuel Buyer offers users a complete view of market conditions, prices, news and other information needed for effective fuel purchasing and is the home page of the application. Introduced in February 2006 and recently upgraded, DTN Fuel Buyer is a Web-based application that can be accessed from anywhere and by any company-authorized users with varying information access levels.

Components on the fuel-pricing dashboard include price alerts such as intra-day price changes and outage notices, a spot ticker for market trends, DTN MarketWire headlines for the latest industry news and Market Analysis for a consolidated market location view of products and prices. Updated every 60 seconds, this section compares posted or adjusted prices, DTN FastRack lows and averages, as well as spot prices. All aspects are customizable to the user’s market area.

“The spot ticker is the simple way to watch the market,” said Cathy Duncan, senior product manager, refined fuels for Omaha, Neb.-based DTN. “The spot ticker is a bigger influence on prices now than NYMEX and helps with putting off loads or pulling as many loads as possible before price changes.”

The spot ticker gives seven-day price trending graphed against NYMEX. The Price Analysis area of Fuel Buyer provides a personalized view of supplier prices with views of a single terminal, all terminals in a city or all within a user-defined area.



Best Rack gives a comparison of prices sorted from low to high based on the load the user wants to pull and can also do this according to load proportions. If freight is involved, Best Rack calculates freight costs, surcharges and minimum freight quantities, then adds this to total product cost and re-sorts.

“With freight added in, you can see the best location to pull from,” Duncan said. Users can also enter blend recipes to calculate prices or look at contract prices. “Fuel Buyer can be customized to allow others in the company to view prices, from high-level buyers to dispatchers. It can be customized to control what is seen or accessed.”

ADD SYSTEMS

Advanced Digital Data Systems carries a wide range of products for the petroleum and convenience-store industries.

“We’ve grown through acquisition,” said Bruce Bott, vice president of sales and marketing for the Flanders, N.J.-based company. “Each competitor we’ve acquired had its own products.”

Recently, ADD has developed a group of e-commerce applications allowing for the import and export of data from a variety of third-party sources, to streamline processes and virtually eliminate manual data entry.

“ADD’s suite of e-commerce applications has probably delivered the most significant impact on the management of fuel data for both the wholesaler and retailer of gasoline,” said Suzanne Bowers, ADD national sales manager. “On the sales side, e-commerce allows the import and collection of

fuel sales and inventory from electronic tank monitors such as Intellifuel and Simmons, Power*Store and a variety of POS systems. The data is imported electronically to fuel management, store station reporting and dispatching components of the home office enterprise accounting system, PAMS (Petroleum Accounting Management System) which is ADD's integrated software solution for marketers."

PAMS utilizes modules that tailor the product to client needs. The financial module includes accounts payable and receivable, general ledger and payroll. The retail module includes Advanced Dispatch, an option which projects fuel re-supply dates and amounts, monitors tank inventory and fuel sales, identifies the most economical fuel-dispatching solutions and monitors supply points. According to ADD, this software package will improve data collection and reporting, reduce daily reporting errors, eliminate redundant paperwork, reduce dependence on individual managers and supervisors, and provide timely fuel-dispatching data.

FACTOR

FACTOR, Inc., based in Oklahoma City, Okla., is the industry's only fully integrated, end-to-end, terminal-to-pump software solutions provider, according to Ted Elston, vice president of marketing.

"No other company can say that," he said. "With the FACTOR system, the flow of key data and resulting decision support information is never interrupted or compromised because it never leaves the corporate database."

The company maintains that data and business runs smoother with a single system such as FACTOR's rather than a system using interfaces to join together different software solutions from different providers.

A Web-based architecture facilitating secure, real-time, interactive and remote data exchange between a home office and c-store back office locations is FACTOR's latest technology. For fuel management and purchasing prior to delivery, the company offers a modular system powered by FACTOR ExecuTrak, a base system combining all corporate accounting functions. Other ExecuTrak features include Fuel Management, from point of dispatch to point of purchase, through delivery to billing of product, and Best Buy, which can identify alternative terminals, vendors and freight costs to maximize profitability when filling a dispatch order. FuelTrak, an integrated, interactive and real-time delivery dispatch management module uses on-board truck technology to offer real-time billing, inventory management, multiple end-of-day automated reconciliations and real-time customer service inquiries.

FACTOR's ExecuTrak Fuel Management also helps marketers manage fuel once it's in the ground. Inventory reconciliation reports, recommended dispatch reports, load-to-

load, customer-by-customer, time period fuel-profitability reports, fuel margin analysis and FIFO cost layering are generated. DeliveryTrak provides automated dispatch and automatic dispatcher notifications based on pre-set supply levels. DataTrak, FACTOR's reporting portal, sends e-mail to notify dispatchers when retail tanks don't reconcile and a keep-full system to assist dispatchers with these kinds of accounts.

"We know the importance of seamless data flow and data integrity first-hand because we are petroleum marketers ourselves," Elston said. Its sister company, Hess Oil, has used FACTOR software to manage operations since 1979.

WARREN ROGERS ASSOCIATES

PetroNetwork Continual Reconciliation System, developed by Middletown, R.I.-based Warren Rogers Associates, provides temperature compensated measurements of sales transactions and stored product amounts to provide a finely tuned fuels inventory management system, according to William P. Jones, company executive vice president.

"The system is Internet-based, hooked into the operator's system, so what's being introduced into tanks and what's being sold is available in real-time," Jones said. "The system can be used to forecast when a delivery is needed and the most efficient allocation in a load."

PetroNetwork also provides an audit of deliveries, detailing how much was actually delivered so that short deliveries or improper billing can be detected.

"Our latest technology encompasses applications that have been developed based upon feedback WRA has received from customers acquainted with the data available from PetroNetwork. Because of recent volatility in fuel pricing, the system's inherent capability to audit product deliveries has been in much broader use of late," Jones said. "We are essentially statisticians — we fingerprint where problems might exist."

PetroNetwork is designed for sites already equipped with an automatic tank-gauging system. A data acquisition processor is installed to communicate with the ATG, as well as the pump controllers. Continual reconciliation reporting is provided through secure Internet access.

"We identify where marketers are losing product inventory. We can detect meters that are out of calibration, giving away product to customers as well as ineffective repairs. We can tell exactly where the problem is and this saves clients money," said Jones.

In business over 25 years, WRA's clients include high activity sites such as Pilot, Loves and Powell Travel Centers and Travel Centers of America.

OPW FUEL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

OPW, based in Hodgkins, Ill., has designed and manufactured



OPW Fuel Management Systems

automated fuel management systems since 1961. The company's latest technology is Internet-related.

"While we're in the process of revamping our software to be browser-based, we have just added TCP/IP connectivity to permit users to communicate with our fuel control and automatic tank-gauging systems via the Internet and/or Local Area Networks (LANs)," said Tom Lane, vice president of the OPW Fuel Control Group.

OPW's SiteSentinel system is a multi-function inventory and leak detection tank-gauging system that provides continuous inventory monitoring information, delivery and environmental compliance for up to 16 underground storage tanks. OPW fuel control systems also offer a declining inventory feature with a low-level alarm for re-ordering, according to Lane. Inventory reports are generated at "the touch of a button," while automatic delivery, alarm and leak reports are available.

"The technology employed in SiteSentinel's tank probes produces a very accurate measuring device. It can tell how much water is in a tank, when fuel was delivered and will temperature-compensate. It's a tool for making sure suppliers are delivering accurate amounts and charging correctly," Lane said.

Although they can be used separately, SiteSentinel works with Phoenix, an OPW program that allows the management of a network of sites. Information is gathered from sites using a LAN or public Internet provider. "There is no expense in added phone lines," Lane said.

Phoenix includes a new Autopoll Scheduler that allows activities to be scheduled to be automatically performed daily, weekly or monthly. Phoenix Plus consolidates data from multiple sites at one time, schedules printing of reports and exports data. Phoenix Premier offers complete, real-time site reconciliation by using site data from an OPW or other brand of tank gauge. It also polls the PetroVend Fuel Control System for site, account, card and transaction data. Most data can be exported to third-party database and spreadsheet programs for further processing.

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VEEDER-ROOT

Veeder-Root, well-known supplier of automatic tank-gauging and fuel-management systems including Red Jacket submersible pumps and pressurized line-leak detectors, released several new products recently at The NACS Show. New product announcements included the industry's first real-time wireless automatic tank gauging with continuous statistical in-tank leak detection without tank shutdown.

A new version of Inform — Veeder-Root's remote communications software that helps station owners utilize their automatic tank gauge consoles, automate data collection and provide report generation with increased control over all sites through centralized inventory, leak detection and diagnostic information — also was recently announced. The new 4.0 Inform release has enhanced monitoring features for ATGs which will save in connection time and enable the use of one software to monitor all types of ATGs, according to Rick Fricke, director of marketing for the Simsbury, Conn.-based company.

Veeder-Root is one of the few companies in the industry that designs, manufactures and services its own products.

"We're doing a whole lot of stuff," said Fricke. "In environmental, we've released new product features in the tank gauge that improve upon leak detection like the continuous pump run monitor, which monitors the STP to see if the pump is stuck. When a pump is stuck on, it can't detect a leak. We released a product recently that looks for that condition and puts out an alarm. No one else in the market is doing this yet. We also have some maintenance tracking products to improve service control, as well as reporting capabilities of the tank gauge for environmental compliance reasons.

"We did a joint development with Gilbarco and released the Guardian leak-prevention solution. It's a double-walled containment system for all underground components," Fricke said.

Veeder-Root took the components of the Gilbarco Guardian system and is releasing them as individual components, mostly for retrofit applications. The most significant aspect of this venture, according to Fricke, is the contained STP for retrofit applications. **NPN**

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