

CABBIES HAVE IN BUILT SAT NAV

In the latest tests, scientists have discovered that London's taxi drivers' brains have an in-built sat-nav. By using magnetic scanners to explore the brain activity of taxi drivers as they navigated their way through a virtual simulation of London's streets, scientists saw that different brain regions were activated as the drivers considered route options, spotted familiar landmarks or thought about their passengers. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) was used to get "minute by minute" brain images from 20 taxi drivers as they took passengers to destinations on "virtual jobs". The scientists adapted the Playstation2 game "Getaway" to bring the streets of London into the scanner. The hippocampus was only active when the taxi drivers initially planned their route, or if they had to completely change their destination during the course of the journey. Another part of the brain helped taxi drivers to track how close they were to the endpoint of their journey; like a metal detector, its activity increased when they were closer to their goal. Changes also occurred in brain regions that are important in social behaviour.

This latest research was shown at the BA Science Festival. Studies carried out previously had already shown that taxi drivers have a larger hippocampus, the region which plays an important part in navigation. "We were keen to go beyond brain structure - and see what activity is going on inside the brains of taxi drivers while they are doing their job," said Dr Hugo Spiers from University College London.

WHERE IS MY MOBILE?

Unsurprisingly to cab drivers, results from a new survey show how many absent minded passengers lose or leave their mobiles in the back of cabs. So far this year alone, 55,843 phones have been found in the back of cab. A survey by mobile device security outfit Credant Technologies, based on a poll of 300 London cabbies, estimates 6,193 other electronic devices (laptops, iPods and memory sticks) were lost over the same period. Credant makes the obvious point that mobile devices ought to be protected by encryption, especially since more sophisticated next generation smartphones are capable of storing more information. Michael Callahan, Chief Marketing Officer at Credant Technologies said: "It's only when you've lost a mobile device containing all your friends, family and business contacts or your company's data that you really understand how disastrous it can be. If it gets into the wrong hands of a criminal, hacker or opportunist losing your mobile device can have serious implications, so our advice is always encrypt it and password protect it to stop it ever being accessed by anyone other than yourself."



The survey of licensed cab drivers took place in New York and London at the same time. Taxi drivers report that passengers use about half their time (44 per cent) during a ride to catch up on work, either using their phone to make a call or sending an email.

Mobiles are not the only things that have been found in the back of cabs - false teeth, artificial limbs and laptops are just a few of the others.

RADIO TAXIS SIGNS UP TO MULTI-CHANNEL BILLING

Radio Taxis Group has signed a three year contract to outsource its billing function. Microgen is an information and business process management company. The multi-channel billing comprising print, e-Billing and online document management, enabling it to realise cost efficiencies and business process improvements, as well as furthering its commitment to being environmentally friendly. Radio Taxis will use the billing solution provided by Microgen to invoice customers as well as provide drivers with their payment statements.

Under the new billing system, customers will be sent a link electronically which they will click on in order to download their latest billing information. The 'pull' system has two key advantages. Firstly, it enables them to see which customers have downloaded their invoice meaning that payment is likely to be in progress. Secondly, it will allow them to see who is engaging with the new system and drive uptake as needed.

Peter Gibson, COO at RTG, said: "We're constantly looking for ways to improve our operational performance, but they have to fit in with our commitment to being a carbon neutral company. Adopting multi-channel billing will provide us with better traceability that will improve the invoice payment process, as well as the obvious cost advantages, whilst contributing to our commitment to the environment. Initially we will roll out e-Billing as an opt-in scheme that will run in parallel to ongoing paper-based billing activity and then over time we'll migrate to a full e-Billing model. What appealed to us about Microgen was their willingness to work with us to drive the take up of e-Billing amongst our customers and to look at new opportunities, such as extending the system to our drivers."

Radio Taxis' drivers are paid based on the number of journeys completed; using a secure log-in they will be able to see a copy of their payment statements detailing journeys completed, amounts being paid and payment dates. As with customers this will initially run as an opt-in scheme, with paper based paper statements being phased out over time. Microgen provides a managed B2B and B2C e-Billing service that will facilitate a structured transition for Radio Taxis from print to electronic billing. With no software to install, no systems to manage and minimal up front expenditure required, outsourcing their billing to Microgen offered Radio Taxis an economical way to maximise the effectiveness of their billing process and enable drivers to receive their payment statements quickly and efficiently.

Chris Beed, Divisional Managing Director, Microgen said: "Companies who require a streamlined billing process are increasingly looking at outsourcing as a way of improving customer service, because they see the competitive advantages it offers to their business. Radio Taxis' innovative use of e-Billing will enable them to enhance their customer relationships as well as providing them with a scaleable infrastructure for the future. We are delighted that Radio Taxis' have chosen Microgen and look forward to working with them to make the successful transition from print to e-Billing."

