



"Once burned twice shy. ..." Companies sometimes fall into the trap of thinking rerouting isn't worth the trouble because some past attempt didn't turn out well. This view reflects shortsighted thinking. With better planning and communications, operators can avoid rerouting pitfalls.

Debunking the Five Myths of 'Rerouting'

How to manage route optimization for faster growth without alienating customers or route reps

By Troy Lovins

Mention the word "rerouting" in the textile services industry and you'll likely hear moans and groans. Many operators and route reps view the process as so painful that they'll do anything can to avoid it. Or, they'll make cosmetic changes to a few routes and declare victory prematurely because the notion of starting with a clean slate is just too daunting.

Delaying route optimization only makes matters worse. Over the years, the routes that once seemed logical get stretched and twisted through additions/deletions of customers, along with the exceptions

that are made, such as giving a customer to a "favored" route rep. Most of the time, the rationale that companies use to avoid rerouting reflects misconceptions based on previous rerouting efforts that went awry. This article will examine the five myths of rerouting that prevail in our industry, and how you can overcome them to manage a successful route-optimization effort.

Myth #1
Mapping is the most important part of rerouting.

As wonderful as today's technology is, a true route optimization

goes far beyond just mapping. No matter what type of software you're using, rerouting should extend beyond the computer program and into customer-focused transition strategies, as well as a plan to garner employee buy-in. Extensive route analysis is always the first step to changing your route plans. It could be that only 10%-15% of your customers need to be adjusted, or you may need to adjust over half your customers, but the software may not tell you that. You must identify and take into consideration various obstacles and exceptions. At the same time, you must remember to carefully weigh the importance of each exception. (Too many exceptions could sink the entire effort.)

Once you've remapped your routes, the process doesn't end there. Make sure you're clearly communicating with your customers on what the changes mean. You want to ensure that the transition from one route rep to the next, or from one delivery day to another is as seamless as possible. Make sure you have a system in place to help employees and customers get through the changes.

Internal communication also is vital. Doug McGarry, plant manager for Paris Companies, DuBois, PA, says, "The biggest issue with rerouting is poor planning and the lack of communication. This communication is particularly important between your production team and the services group." It's important to help everyone involved understand how a reroute benefits the customer, the company and their department, while making the process as painless as possible. For example, if you help the route reps understand how the route optimization will make their jobs better, the process will be much smoother for everyone.

Sandy, office manager for a national uniform provider, adds that, "It is important to make sure that your route reps are prepared, know where they are going and have a plan in place to make sure they have the time to properly introduce themselves to new customers."



Doug McGarry, plant manager
Paris Companies, DuBois, PA

Myth #2

I don't fit the criteria for needing a reroute

We hear a lot of reasons why textile services companies don't believe they need to consider a reroute. Some of the ones we hear most often include:

- Our delivery costs match the industry average
- All our route reps are back in the plant on time
- Our customers are happy
- It's always worked before—why fix what isn't broken?

The truth is, even if all the above are true, why wouldn't you want to have the most efficient routing possible? Why wouldn't you want to save time and lower your delivery costs? One of our rerouting specialists recently worked with a general manager who had been in the same plant for more than 20 years. He questioned the need for a new way of doing things. But within six weeks of implementing the new process, the company experienced a double-digit drop in its delivery costs and managed to eliminate roughly seven hours of

weekly driving time in one route alone. Along with having more time with his customers, the rerouting created opportunities for the route rep to service additional revenue.

Myth #3

All reroutes negatively affect customers

There's a huge misconception that doing a reroute will undermine customer satisfaction. Some have even told us they think a reroute would cost them 10% of their customers. The industry thinks that if they move a customer's delivery day or change their route rep, that the customer is going to get angry. We've all heard a route rep say, "If you take 'ABC Company' away from me, we'll lose them." We hate to be the one to deflate the route rep's ego, but that's rarely the case. You can head off this concern by helping customers understand that they'll benefit from these changes because the route rep can reinvest "dashboard" time into more "face time" with customers.

The key is to manage the communication process. Make sure that the information is presented properly. This takes planning and diligence, but it makes a huge difference. If a reroute is done properly, you'll rarely, if ever, lose a customer. Plus, spending more time with customers allows route reps to build better relationships, which ultimately has a positive impact on revenue.

Myth #4

Rerouting isn't worth the effort

The perception of rerouting among many in the industry is that it's painful for everyone involved and that the financial benefits don't outweigh the added stress and frustration. High delivery costs usually spur a rerouting effort, but the decision to consider route optimization may come from a service manager's recommendation, or through a mandate from the management team. Either way, it's important to evaluate the financial benefits of a reroute.

"If used properly, reroutes are an important tool to help route reps," said Ron, a route rep for a national uniform provider. "For example, right now I have to drive 24 miles each way to service a \$30-a-week account. Not only am I spending an hour each week for a \$2.10 commission, but there is another route rep who comes within five miles of that customer who could easily service it. If the routes were properly planned, it would be financially beneficial for both of us."

Some believe that reroutes mean missed revenue due to skipped deliveries, missed invoices, or a need for credits. If properly planned, managed and communicated, a reroute should produce none of those negative side effects. Moreover, the benefits should be plentiful. For example, imagine a plant that runs 12 routes. Having more efficient routes means savings on mileage, gasoline and maintenance costs. In fact, most properly managed reroutes will result in approximately 20% fewer miles. So, if your team averages 150 miles a day and your delivery costs are 50 cents a mile, the difference for a 12-route company would be \$1,260 a week, or \$65,520



A successful route-optimization effort goes beyond mapping and software. Technology's important, but it can't take the place of consumer-focused transition strategies, as well as outreach to employees affected by the changes. In essence, rerouting requires a series of steps before a company can achieve its goals.

annually. Additionally, a proper reroute will not only generate financial benefits, but your route reps also will have more time to spend with their customers. That translates to better customer service.

Myth #5 **Route reps won't like it**

At first, route reps—particularly long-term employees—may not like the idea of a reroute. After all, they've worked hard building relationships, and they have customers who've become friends over the years. But doing a reroute doesn't necessarily mean that employee morale will suffer. One of the keys to a successful reroute is helping route reps understand that the process will benefit them as well.

When routes are optimized, route reps typically have a more concentrated geographic area. This means spending less time behind the windshield and more time with their customers. While the process of getting acquainted with new customers will take time, after the first 30 days, route reps should start seeing the benefits of a properly instituted rerouting effort.

Make no mistake: We aren't saying that rerouting is easy. There are a lot of difficult issues that can arise before, during or after the transition. Even the smallest details, such as retaping (i.e., updating garment labels to reflect new routes), can have a huge impact on a

reroute's success and how it's perceived. You can expect some real challenges during any rerouting process. The key is to plan properly for and manage the issues, while clearly communicating the benefits to customers, the company and your route reps. Customers see the benefits of better service because the route rep has more time to service their account. The company sees the financial benefits of the reroute, while the route reps trade windshield minutes for face time with customers that typically leads to additional income.

The bottom line is that route optimization can pay huge dividends for your business. Just remember to think twice about our industry's common misconceptions. With time and planning, you can overcome the five myths of rerouting and in so doing reap tremendous benefits in terms of reduced costs and improved customer service. **TR**



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