

AN OPERATOR'S BEST FRIEND



CCTV and telematics have come on leaps and bounds in recent years. One company at the forefront of the industry is Centrad. **John Lewis** spoke to its founder and owner to find out more

G Geoff Cross is uniquely placed when it comes to advising bus operators on how best to ensure the safety and security of passengers and drivers. That's because the founder and owner of onboard CCTV and telematics specialist Centrad ran his own bus company in Birmingham for 15 years.

"I started Central Buses back in 2003 with just one bus," he recalled. "By the time I sold it to Rotala in February 2018 however I had 32, and employed 60 staff across three depots. Having operated a fleet myself I know what the challenges are, and I believe I know the solutions."

His interest in CCTV was triggered after Central Buses was on the receiving end of a steady stream of what he refers to as phantom insurance claims; dishonest attempts by unscrupulous passengers to defraud his

firm by alleging they had been injured as a consequence of the conduct of one of his drivers at the wheel.

"We had situations where we were getting as many as 25 claims from passengers who reckoned they had been injured because the driver had braked too harshly," he said. "However, at the time of the incident there were no more than three passengers on board."

He set up Centrad while he was still running Central Buses. The business started out supplying LED destination displays, but the need for what Geoff describes as 'an accurate eye-witness' led to it expanding into onboard CCTV. "We looked at the onboard CCTV systems that were already on the market, but felt that they were expensive and the quality wasn't good enough," he said.

So in 2008 Centrad developed and came up with its own range of camera products. "We

designed it ourselves and had it manufactured in the Far East to our specifications," said Geoff. "Technology is moving at a fast pace and systems have developed significantly since."

He began by equipping his own fleet. "We were at the stage where if we hadn't fitted cameras, Central Buses would have become unviable," he observed. Their presence made it easier to rebut dishonest claims, and undoubtedly deterred fraudsters from chancing their arm. "Other benefits include driver behaviour monitoring and protecting our staff and customers," he said. "Cameras are a driver's best friend or worst enemy."

Having kitted out his own vehicles, Geoff began supplying CCTV to other operators; and Centrad began to expand significantly. "So when I was approached at the end of 2017 with an acquisition proposal for Central Buses, I made the decision to sell and invest my time into Centrad," he said.

Today Centrad is based in Tamworth, Staffordshire, having moved out of Birmingham. The business is going from strength to strength and has recently acquired a 3,500 sq ft purpose-built office space with a demonstration suite.

"We've got 700 fleet customers, including a number of very well known operators, and we installed 10,000 cameras last year," he said. Around 70% of the cameras Centrad fits are mounted on buses, with commercial vehicles accounting for a high percentage of the remainder.

These days the company installs HD – high-definition – resolution cameras. "That's our standard offering and it provides images that are three times the quality of the images from the cameras we used to fit," Geoff said.

"Our most popular DVR (digital video recorder) is the CEN102 AHD, our eight plus four camera option," he added. "It is able to support up to eight AHD cameras and four 1080P IP cameras that can also offer audio and infrared night vision."

When Geoff ran Central Buses, he installed four-camera solutions. These days eight cameras are being fitted to vehicles and Centrad can provide a maximum of 24 so that there is full coverage.

Images are recorded on an onboard DVR with an internal lockable SD card or hard drive that can be physically removed so that they can be viewed on a desktop PC. They can also be downloaded using a WLAN – wireless local area network – when the bus returns to its depot.

On the options list is built-in 4G for live remote viewing and management on a smartphone, tablet or PC. "It will be even