**Why UPS drivers don't make left turns**

By Shawna Ohm, Wed, Oct 1, 2014

UPS announced earlier this fall that in order to meet growing holiday demand the company would operate on all cylinders the Friday after Thanksgiving. In the past, only UPS air operations ran that day; this year, the company’s trucks will be on the road as well.

One thing you won’t see those trucks doing while they’re out delivering packages? Make left turns.

“I have nothing against left turns, it’s just amazing how our methods over the years continue to show it’s always better to have right turn[s],” said Mark Wallace, Vice President of U.S. Industrial Engineering at the company.

How does UPS know that right turns are better? The company built a proprietary GPS system called Orion. It stands for On-Road Integrated Optimization and Navigation. Think of it as Apple or Google maps on steroids. Instead of showing you different ways to get from point A to point B, taking into account traffic and tolls, ORION shows you the best way to get from point A to Z and all the stops in between while also making specified delivery windows and getting you your packages before, say, 5pm. That efficiency is important, given the company delivers nearly 17 million packages each day.

The thing is, when ORION calculates the most efficient route, it almost never routes a left turn.

When Yahoo Finance asked UPS’s Chief Commercial Officer, Alan Gershenhorn, about it he gave two additional reasons for ORION. The first is safety, the second is stoplights.  
  
“Obviously making left turns [is] more dangerous because you’re crossing an intersection versus not,” he said. Plus, “You can keep moving in many places making right turns where left turns you have to wait.”

All 50 states including the District of Columbia allow right turns on red, however certain cities, like New York, ban the practice.

Last year, UPS faced scrutiny after a surge in online orders combined with terrible weather meant thousands of customers didn’t get their packages delivered in time for Christmas. This year, the company is going to lengths to make sure that doesn’t happen again, including investing half a billion dollars in new infrastructure.

That includes doubling down on ORION driving software. This year, more than twice as many UPS drivers will have ORION than last year, about 45% of them. The company hopes the program will help make drivers more efficient as they strive to meet increased online shopping demand (e-commerce is expected to jump some 15% this holiday).

But as more drivers use ORION there are a few loopholes emerging to the “no left turn” rule of thumb

“We do find places now that we see drivers that actually take some left turns because it optimizes [the route],” said Wallace, though they’re generally in more rural areas.

If you’re intrigued by the route-optimization technology, you’re not alone. Still, UPS has no plans to offer it to anyone not in a brown uniform.

“There are no plans [to offer ORION to customers],” Wallace said. “I do have customers who are very interested to understand more about [the technology] but right now our plans are to [keep] it internal.”