

ALCOM - a lifeline of the forestry business

Communications are the lifeline of business today and Rotorua-based ALCOM Communication Services is a leader supplier to the forestry industry.

Forestry is a big part of ALCOM's business and an area in which the company has a lot of experience, says ALCOM Managing Director, Jim Comber.

"We intimately know what the customer requires because we have been dealing with the sector for so long - we know the lay of the land."

Comber has been involved in the forestry industry for 27 years and has been in communications all that time. He was with the Forest Service initially and ALCOM has been established for nearly 13 years.

Although it started as a company serving the forestry industry, it has since expanded until today its has a wide range of customers, including local bodies, the Fire Service, the Ambulance Service, Civil Defence and the Prison Service.

"So we do have a lot of communications sites on hilltops around the Central North Island."

ALCOM is an authorised dealer for Motorola and Tait Communications products, supplying radio telephones to service the forestry industry. A major change in the industry has been the move to key supplier groups by the large forestry companies.

Comber says that ALCOM is a partner with Fletcher Challenge Forests, for example, and looks after its communications as well as having quite an involvement with many of the contractors to assist them with their communications.

Comber says a new trend has been the introduction of trunk systems. Many log transport companies were previously using cellular phones for calls they were unable to make on the regular RT networks. But the prohibitive cost of this has seen a shift to the trunk system.

"These companies operate around the clock now. If

they want to timetable their trucks to be at a certain place for drivers changes and if they have a breakdown, they can't use the forest company's channels. However, the trunk system is purely for their own use and management."

Data transfer using communications system has also been a new development in recent years. Comber says the various uses include alarm monitoring at repeater sites or communication centres, transfer of bar code information at sawmills and processing plants, and sending text messages to and from log transport trucks.

ALCOM is well situated to meet the needs of the forestry industry, being sited adjacent to the Waipa mill near Rotorua.

Adding density to the log making criteria?

The developers of Hitman, Industrial Research Ltd., have won the Electronic Product Excellence Award at the 1999 Electronic and Software Industry Awards. Developed in a joint project with Carter Holt Harvey, the Hitman uses sound waves to assess the stiffness and fibre properties of tree stems. The device has been developed to help an operator decide where to cut a stem to maximise value.

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