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The March of Technology

How are you going to make money at the lower margins of 2016? Freight is down, trucks are plentiful, and fuel is down so much that you need to get a lot of new business just to keep your revenue even. Not an easy environment. And it's going to get tougher.

Margins have been coming down since the late 1970s. Why would they stop now? When I started brokering in 1977, margins were usually 50 percent or more. You made a lot of money on each load, but it was all done manually, with three-part forms, ledger books, and handwritten checks.

There were many reasons for such high margins, but the primary one was regulation. Before 1980, if you wanted to become a broker or a carrier, you had to apply to the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) for authority. A carrier, broker, or shipper had to prove to the ICC no one else could handle their shipments–not an easy task. Existing carriers could protest your entry into the market; many fought virtually every application.

When you did get authority, it could be for something as narrow as service between only two states, or even just between two cities. Sometimes exact driving routes were part of your authority.

Regulation dated back to the Great Depression. The ICC, which regulated railroads, was ordered to protect motor carriers from unfair competition. In practice it ultimately protected them from almost all competition.

Shielded from antitrust laws, carriers could all charge the same rates, which were high enough to keep the least efficient of them in business for decades. Efficiency was not important.

Computers didn't emerge in transportation until the mid 1980s. Before then, only the largest carriers had computers–big mainframes. Meanwhile, brokers did everything on paper, with bins, filing cabinets, ledger books, T-cards, and rubber stamps (remember rubber stamps?).

In 1980, transportation was deregulated. Anyone could haul freight or start a brokerage. Prior to 1980, truckloads from New Jersey to California went for over $5,000 with regulated carriers. That's equal to over $15,000 in inflation adjusted dollars.

Predictably, rates came down, though not all at once. In the last 36 years, it has been a slow, irregular, but steady decline. In LTL, a 10-percent discount was standard for a few years; later it was 25 percent. Compare that to today's 70-percent discounts.

Luckily, affordable computers arrived just in time. In 1981, IBM released the IBM PC. Computers with hard drives become popular in the mid-1980s. By 1985, the cost of a 20 MB hard drive had come down to about $3,000, low enough for small businesses to afford. At first computers were glorified typewriters. But when the Internet took off in the late 1990s, they became communication devices. Every year, the software got a little better, increasing efficiency.

The market has changed over the years. Margins are lower, but automation is way up. Virtually every 3rd Party Logistics provider has a computer. Even with today's lower margins, you can still make a great living as a broker. As a matter of fact, there is more freight moving through 3rd party logistics providers than any other time in history. 3PLs are doing it with new and always improving technology.

I ran across an old report I wrote in the mid 1990s. Back then, this report seemed like Star Wars technology to me. It was a printed report that would match up available loads to available trucks. Magically, automatically, a dot matrix printer would just start printing a list of who to call onto the continuous green-bar paper. It worked and we moved loads because of it.

Now a 3PL needs much more than that. With today's lower margins, it's crucial to move more loads with less labor. Instead of someone having to call carriers, today's systems can automatically start emailing carriers with load offers. Instead of making 20 phone calls in 40 minutes, a burst of 20 emails can be sent out in seconds. Instead of manually calling carriers to track deliveries, 3PLs are using EDI, APIs, and options like Macropoint for cell phone tracking.

Another layer of efficiency comes from 3PL websites where customers can track shipment statuses and request quotes. More advanced 3PLs have customers printing their own invoices and PODs, even generating their own reports.

Most 3PLs today have at least a list of available shipments on their website for their carriers. More advanced 3PLs have carriers bidding on shipments and updating delivery statuses. Some allow carriers to check on payment status, and even choose payment terms. The most advanced have options for carriers to accept shipments right from the website, self dispatch, and self invoice. With shippers sending loads in via EDI, it's Uber-like. No one touches it.

Technology can make the difference between profit and loss in a low-margin environment. As margins squeeze ever tighter, staying current with technology can make the ultimate difference between success or failure.

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Is It Time to Think About Logistics Outsourcing?

Changing consumer behaviors, increasing consumer expectations and rapid advancements in technology are converging to create the need for supply chains to be more global, transparent, agile and responsive. We are at a unique point in time with all of these dynamics in place simultaneously that the supply chain function is evolving in its breadth of competency and increasing in its level of complexity. Supply chain management and execution is now viewed as a highly specialized core business function capable of driving favorable results to the bottom line.

To ensure that companies are leveraging the latest strategies for their supply chain operations, many are turning to logistics outsourcing. Companies that outsource their logistics functions are often able to align their supply chain activities more effectively with their overall business strategy, which is a key to success. A logistics outsourcing partner leverages its expertise to help a company advance its supply chain strategy by defining and delivering the network capabilities required to support overall business objectives. The alignment of incentives between a company and its logistics partner is a core element of outsourcing ensuring objectives are clear and collaborative behaviors are fostered.

With this alignment in place, strategic elements in the supply chain can then be executed.

Leading-Edge Solutions Oriented Thinking and Execution – As the demands on supply chains have increased, logistics management practices and technologies have evolved significantly. A logistics outsourcing partner ensures that a company is leveraging leading-edge thinking to define supply chain needs, prioritize challenges and develop and execute customized solutions that are targeted to support specific business objectives.

State-of-the-Art Technology Platforms – End-to-end supply chain visibility provides the foundation to migrate from a reactive supply chain management approach to a proactive model. A logistics outsourcing partner provides a state-of-the-art technology platform that enables transparency of supply chain activities across all trading partners and provides real-time access to vital data. An updated technology platform also provides proactive alerts to network stakeholders on issues affecting supply chain performance and automates responses to disturbances in the supply chain. The result is a much more agile, dynamic and efficient network.

Engineering-Based Network Design, Modeling and Optimization – Proactive supply chain management requires a comprehensive, engineering-based approach to supply chain planning. A logistics outsourcing partner combines engineering and operations expertise with state-of-the-art optimization and simulation software to remove complexity and cost from supply chain infrastructure. Continuous monitoring and assessment of the supply chain helps to ensure that high service levels are maintained while providing the flexibility to meet changing business needs. It also helps minimize the cost and impact of short-term disruptions, such as unexpected changes in consumer demand related to promotional activities.

Driving Value Throughout the Supply Chain – With a holistic approach to the supply chain, a logistics outsourcing partner serves to reduce fragmentation and centralize supply chain activities. This provides a foundation for developing and implementing solutions that drive value and decrease costs throughout the supply chain. A logistics outsourcing partner also fosters collaboration by orchestrating the activities of all trading partners, diminishing the burdens placed on network stakeholders and positioning a company as a "customer of choice" for key network partners.

The need to move more goods to more locations more quickly and accurately than ever is applying unprecedented operational and financial pressure on supply chains. A company's ability to efficiently execute a supply chain strategy in today's environment can be enhanced by logistics outsourcing with a strategic partner.

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The Potential of Change

With schools across the country rapidly increasing the use of technology in the classroom, recent graduates entering the logistics workforce expect similar atmospheres. Without even realizing it, these individuals have trained themselves in a variety of ways to further their career. They are comfortable spending hours a day behind the computer, checking their emails religiously, and adhering to the forever changing landscape that is the university's internal website. They have spent the last few years glued to their laptops; quickly learning and adapting to each professor's different software standards.

So, when they enter the workforce, why would we rip away the technology they have been educated with? Changing certain parts of the business to meet the expectations of millennials may be time consuming and expensive, but will be worth the investment for the future.

Plain and simple, graduates are expecting to complete their work just how they did in college. From turning in papers to taking an exam on the internet, many of their classes were completely paperless. Changing a few areas in the office will ease the transition from school to work.

A proper area for your new employees is a vital resource for their success. For 3PL companies that revolve around the internet, there are a variety of ways to help your employees. First and foremost, laptops and desktops should run the newest software available because most students' personal computers will be running the same platform. With many companies still running an operating system three generations old, it is time to invest in the updated version of Windows 10. Newer platforms also allow for expansion, including running multiple screens.

For 3PL companies, phones are also a vital part of the company. Outside the realm of business, landlines are a dying breed. These younger people will not have experience with the phones at first. These landlines should operate in a similar fashion to their smartphones. With a phone call sometimes not the best form of communication, there is software available to directly text from your computer.

Beyond the workplace, the numbers side of business can quickly be customized to fit the millennials' needs. 3PL could be completely done online if it wasn't for some companies that still request paper copies of their legal documents. Paper copies will soon be history. ACH payments that directly send money from bank to bank have many positive aspects. You will not be spending time stuffing envelopes full of checks, your payments will be secure, and you will be able to control exactly when customers receive their money. Transitioning away from such a solid foundation is frustrating and time consuming, but it will ensure your business will be prepared for the future.

After changing a few aspects in your company, you will begin to notice just how the investment paid off. Desktops will be less cluttered, electronic documents will be easy to find on the server, and your employees will be comfortable in the work environment.

Set your mind at ease and recognize the potential for millennials and their technology.

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Optimizing Inbound for Improved E-Commerce Fulfillment

E-commerce is changing warehousing. Consumers want to purchase merchandise at any time, from anywhere—whether it is online, mobile, or in a store. As a result, efficient and reliable omni-channel fulfillment has become an imperative for retailers. To better align business models with the new paradigm, retailers and logistics providers are augmenting their distribution networks to focus on the consumer, resulting in several interesting warehousing trends.

Several of those trends involve the physical size and location of distribution centers (DCs). Increases in order throughput, in conjunction with larger numbers of stock keeping units (SKUs) and greater order complexity, are catalyzing the need for additional aggregate DC capacity. Retailers are also pushing inventory carrying costs and direct fulfillment activities upstream of storefronts, adding to the need for a larger DC footprint.

At the same time, more demanding consumer expectations, relating to delivery times and returns, are necessitating the proliferation of smaller and more regionalized warehouses and DCs, as opposed to the mega DC model. The resulting scheme comprises increasing numbers of potentially smaller DCs located close to major population areas. This positioning also gives retailers access to the greater workforce needed for running e-commerce fulfillment operations.

Bringing Focus Back to Inbound

With e-commerce spurring rapid change in warehousing, retailers and logistics providers need to evaluate how inbound logistics can help optimize e-commerce fulfillment operations. Inbound logistics has a major impact on the customer experience—even if it is well hidden from the consumer's view. As an example, many online retailers promise two-day shipping, but that does not equate to two days for the retailer or logistics provider. Shipping, fulfillment, and inventory availability all play symbiotic roles in enabling two-day deliveries for customers. Given their symbiotic relationships, it is vital to evaluate the supply chain from a holistic point of view.

Three Keys for Better Inbound

There are three key aspects of inbound logistics that enable a better e-commerce experience: demand planning, modal selection, and product availability. For consumers, the most visible of the three is product availability. If a product is not available to order, it stops a sale dead in its tracks. Depending on the timeframe a consumer may need a product, lack of availability could drive business elsewhere, opening the door for other retailers to take market share.

Less visible to the consumer—but no less important—is modal selection. This needs to be considered with great care, as it can become a balancing act between optimizing profit and ensuring availability. Transportation leaders are being challenged by the ebbs and flows of the pricing environment, all while juggling the choice between less-than-truckload (LTL) and truckload.

A third aspect of inbound logistics is demand planning, which can help alleviate the pressures of pondering modal selection. Demand planning is informed and influenced by many different departments within an organization—with marketing among the most important. If not integrated with demand planning, marketing initiatives can seriously disrupt fulfillment. A website may offer a bundle of products at a discounted rate, but the online special will result in many dissatisfied customers if a DC was not prepared with the appropriate stock for timely fulfillment.

The Fundamental Fix for a Better Supply Chain

Poorly planned inbound operations can be disruptive to an otherwise-adequate fulfillment operation. The fundamental fix to the problem is supply chain visibility. A more comprehensive approach to supply chain management—one that includes visibility into the complexities of inventory supply, inbound transportation, order fulfillment, and outbound transportation—can help to provide for a great omni-channel experience, one that encourages customer loyalty and optimizes profitability.

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Truckload Capacity: There is Always a Truck Going That Way

Hundreds of calls, page by page through the carrier listings. Ninety-nine percent of the replies are, "Sorry, we don't hire out." But through all the searching, you always find one. That gem in the rough who runs the lane. They are booked out for the week, but now you have them in your pocket. Success!

Searching for capacity is a tough job. The number of carriers out there is astronomical, but there is always somebody driving where you need to go. By the very nature of the industry, if there is a population, then they need trucks to deliver the necessities and niceties of life. Knowing they are there doesn't make them any easier to find; it takes tenacity, honesty, and persistence.

Tenacity like a bulldog, or a gila monster here in the Southwest. Grab it and don't let go. In the very transactional environment of truckload freight brokering, it's easy to commit a couple hours to finding a carrier to match a load, then move on. In order to build a robust portfolio of carriers and have someone in place next time that obscure load becomes available, you need to take the long perspective. That obscure load will come by again, and you could cover it with a single call if you put the time into it now. Grab that lane and follow it through until you know who to call on it. But knowing who to call is just the first part. They have to know you.

Honesty is the fulcrum of industry. After you have built your portfolio, those dispatchers and drivers need to know they can count on you. They need to know your word is your bond and they can count on that load to come through for them. Trust is the chassis of communication; everything stands on it. An intriguing study on game theory proves that those who play a fair game and communicate with honesty come out ahead in the long run.

Winning in the long run also takes persistence. You must be persistent in your contact strategy and approach. Become the most reliable and sticky broker to your carriers. Plan your work and work your plan as long as you can. Henry Ford is well known for persistence bordering on stubborn with respect to continued production of the Tin Lizzie Model T long after other manufacturers released modernized horseless carriages. So your portfolio, persistence, and follow up will pay off. A carrier relationship built over years will almost certainly be financially fulfilling.

If you are building a brokerage from scratch, or struggling to grow what you've got, remember the fundamentals never change. There is always a truck going that way; you've just got to have the grit to find it. You need tenacity to find them, honesty to win them over, and persistence to keep that hard earned capacity a phone call away.

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Increased Visibility

The strength of any supply chain is in its individual links. For shippers of all types of freight, that means having visibility into accurate and timely load locations. For shippers, carriers, brokers and third party logistics services providers, the MacroPoint freight tracking solution is proving to be the answer.

Today as well, shippers are requiring more than 100% visibility. They are also demanding information that enables them to manage by exception, to focus on late and off-schedule loads that threaten to disrupt their supply chains, and it is easy to see why.

For every unreported late load, the consequences are clear:

- A retailer would have to work around the lack of inventory on store shelves
- A distribution operation might have to adjust staffing on its loading docks to account for both unproductive time and the need for personnel when a load does finally arrive
- A factory might need to idle or ramp up a production line accordingly

With timely and accurate load status information, however, shippers can focus on loads that have the potential to disrupt operations, and make more informed decisions about scheduling, inventory and staffing in advance. This process of using predictive analytics and managing by exception enables retailers, distributors and manufacturers to have full visibility into the location and status of their freight.

Having predictive analytics capabilities means that instead of expending significant management time manually gathering information on 100% of the loads in their supply chains, they only need to focus on the loads that look as if they might be late.

New mandates from major retailers for increased visibility into load status are also among the latest challenges facing for-hire, contract and private carriers, as well as brokers and 3PLs. This higher demand includes requirements by these shippers for the following information:

- Arrival at Pickup Status Update–Within 1 hour of event
- Departure at Pickup Status Update–Within 1 hour of event
- Arrival at Destination–Within 1 hour of event
- Complete Unloaded Status Update–Within 1 hour of event
- In-transit updates every hour
- All of these updates must also contain actual lat/long positioning

The ability to meet those requirements from a growing number of large, well known companies can mean the difference between securing their business or losing out on a significant number of freight hauling opportunities.

Just a few years ago, however, it was unrealistic for shippers to expect total visibility into load locations and status from the carriers in their freight networks. Today, with technologies like the MacroPoint load tracking solution, which currently is being used by nine out of the top ten asset-based carriers, 62% of the top brokers, and over 750,000 drivers, all parties involved in moving freight have greater connectivity and visibility in real time.

The patented system only requires an in-cab system or any connected device, including a driver's phone. Through its integration with enterprise management and TMS systems, MacroPoint can provide the more frequent and detailed updates that shippers now require to keep their supply chains intact. The tracking process can even use "geofences" at arrival and departure locations, or along routes, to update the status of shipments automatically.

Perhaps the best testimonials about the value of the MacroPoint load tracking solution come from customers like Armstrong Transport Group, a Charlotte, North Carolina-based nationwide network of agents and brokers that provides dry van, refrigerated, flatbed and specialized truckload, LTL, heavy haul, expedited, rail and air freight services throughout North America.

"MacroPoint makes it easier for us to provide load tracking for our many customers with time sensitive needs," said Brian Mann, COO at Armstrong Transport Group. "Meeting their requirement for load status updates every four hours created a lot of work calling drivers and then calling or notifying customers. MacroPoint makes it simple to automate the process, and the ease of integration with our TMS made it a turnkey solution for our users and drivers."

MacroPoint designs freight monitoring and tracking solutions for shippers, brokers and 3PLs. Its patented, automated load monitoring and tracking software provides load location visibility to third parties. The 'pay per use' solution works on any cell phone, not just smart phones, and with existing in-cab ELD/GPS tracking devices to provide real-time location monitoring and tracking, delivery monitoring, and event notifications to third parties. To learn more about MacroPoint's industry leading solution for third party shipment tracking, call 866-960-0328 or visit www.macropoint.com.

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Preparation: The Key to Successful Business…and Procurement Projects

Shippers everywhere are enjoying the "summer of '16." Carrier capacity is abundant, and rates, particularly in the truckload spot market, have fallen by double-digit percentages relative to last year. Contrast this with the "winter of '14" when the Polar Vortex drove spot rates to all-time highs. Since that time, decreasing fuel costs, coupled with favorable regulatory rulings and expanded carrier capacity has clearly pushed the pendulum toward a shipper's market. How long will this last? It's hard to know.

But my boss reads the latest news, and wants savings NOW.

Even though transportation professionals know the perils of short-term thinking, they are still finding themselves under pressure to take advantage of the current market. So how do shippers do this without sacrificing long-term relationships, so that when "winter" returns, they are not left out in the cold?

Like anything in life and in business, a successful procurement project or event is all about the right preparation.

First, turn your focus internally.

Often, procurement events fall short because individuals who put the RFP together in headquarters don't fully understand the specific requirements of the end users within their own organization. You need to understand your actual spend, or in the case of transportation services – your volumes. Make sure you fully understand your needs and volumes (lanes, units of material, etc.) so you can communicate it clearly to participants.

When drafting the RFP, you need to seek out detailed service and quality requirements from the people who will actually be using the services or materials. In transportation, you might learn that the plant needs drop trailers, or perhaps 48-foot trailers because they can't fit 53-footers in the facility.

You also need to know your baseline costs. Because at the end of the day, you need to be able to say whether you did worse, better, or stayed the same.

Then, plan for clear external communications.

When seeking out new suppliers and vendors, it's also crucial to clearly communicate how you expect to do business. By clarifying payment terms and conditions upfront, along with how you want to work from a legal perspective, you can avoid going all the way down a path to an award, only to have it fall apart in final negotiations.

Understand the providers in the marketplace.

The next step is to qualify your providers. There is no substitute for due diligence. If you're casting a net for something you don't already buy, then it often makes sense to conduct an RFI (request for information) first, then choose who you'll send the RFP to from the initial respondents.

When structuring the RFP, most procurement strategists advise you to unbundle service elements as much as possible. For example, break apart line haul and fuel surcharge line items to get an apples-to-apples comparison. It also helps to standardize accessorial charges in your RFP.

Be realistic with your timeline.

Most people underestimate how long it will take them to analyze the data and work through their own side of the contract negotiations, especially if they don't conduct procurement events very often.

Complex bid packages virtually guarantee errors in submissions, so sanity check responses, and don't pin your hopes on something that's unrealistic.

And remember: you're being evaluated, too.

Throughout the process, make sure your communication is as consistent, clear and responsive as possible. It's OK to be repetitive and don't lag in responding to questions. If a shipper seems unorganized, carriers will hesitate to offer their most competitive pricing due to fear of the unknown.

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Import Express LCL Service

In an industry where speed of information is constantly improving, it is ironic that the actual speed of the various modes used to move cargo (airplanes, trucks, ships, and trains) has improved very little. That makes even the smallest improvement to the speed of delivery an important consideration. Improvements in speed of delivery typically involve changing processes and/or changing modes, such as a different distribution channel, or moving by truck instead of rail, air instead of ocean, etc.

Using an import express less-than-container (LCL) service, particularly from China, offers cost savings and faster transit times over traditional consolidated LCL services. This can be applicable to multi-customer LCL consolidation services, or a buyer's consolidation, where multiple suppliers for the same customer are consolidated at origin into a full container. In either situation, having the container devanned on the West Coast provides a number of express advantages to the importer.

With more steamship lines calling direct on West Coast ports, the container rates are more price competitive than using rail to inland points, or all-water service to the Gulf and East Coast ports. Consolidating LCL shipments to one destination further reduces per-shipment container freight station costs, customs clearance, and handling costs.

Also, the transit times on the water are roughly two weeks to the West Coast, versus four weeks to East Coast ports. Rail service from the West Coast is a week shorter. Having one to two weeks for domestic distribution allows for more transport options to move product inland. Those options include trans-loading via full truck, partial, or LTL, as well as using package carriers, expedited ground carriers and air freight.

Of course, the import express LCL service provider must have access to competitive domestic pricing with the carriers being used for the potential cost savings to be realized. Those costs include fuel surcharges, which are more quickly adjusted than steamship bunker surcharges. In the current environment those savings are realized quicker on the domestic transportation.

The service provider must also have access to a reliable West Coast container freight station/warehouse that is well positioned geographically, and experienced in providing the multitude of services and domestic transportation options needed to successfully perform the distribution.

While it may be tough to see significant direct apples-to-apples transportation cost savings compared to ocean and intermodal, the flexibility of being able to use the one to two weeks from the West Coast gives the importer better ability to control delivery times, whether to a distribution center, or direct to the end-user. Additional cost savings as a result of faster transit times is the inventory carrying cost reductions based on product not being in the pipeline for as long as standard ocean import services.

If you utilize the import express LCL service, modify your distribution strategy by bypassing distribution centers where possible, and deliver direct to the end-user, especially in the western United States, there is a significant opportunity for cost savings, while getting product to market quicker.

Of course, this strategy doesn't work for every product, every circumstance, every importer, and every time. It was just one year ago when the West Coast port delays choked the supply chain. Importers are still smarting from the delays and associated penalties and costs incurred, and many have committed to alternative ports to avoid any repeat possibility. So it seems counter-intuitive to recommend funneling cargo through the West Coast, particularly with close to 60 percent of consumers still east of the Mississippi.

What a difference one year can make. The circumstances today are very favorable to using an import express LCL service as described. West Coast port labor issues are settled for now, congestion is not an issue, fuel costs are low, domestic transportation options are many, and the ability to take advantage of fast delivery to the end-user is better than ever.

To make this work, you need an experienced service provider, with a reliable West Coast warehouse operation, and a strong domestic transportation network, to help you put together an import express LCL program that delivers your product at a lesser cost, and faster than your competition.

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Keeping an Eye on Cost Management

The transportation and logistics industry is currently experiencing an acceleration of mergers and acquisitions, which is causing dramatic changes to the supply chain. Are you prepared to manage through this ever-changing environment while keeping a focus on managing cost?

The 80/20 Rule of Logistics tells us that 80 percent of supply chain cost and efficiency is inherent to network layout while the final 20 percent is driven by tactical and operational processes guided within that framework. With so many high-impact changes ahead of us, shippers have a prime opportunity to drive cost out of supply chains and alleviate their dependence on squeezing pennies out of the last 20 percent when hundreds of thousands of dollars have been left on the table due to not reevaluating their network.

Cost and arrive-by dates are customers' go-to concerns, but are far from the only relevant issues. Every mile and minute on the road is additional risk for delay, spoilage, accidents, loss, and damage. Each day an order remains in progress is a day that sales, customer service, operations, management, and accounting are spending time following up on that order, and not spending time on growing and securing new business. These soft costs can quickly eclipse the hard costs of transportation, if smart shippers are not careful.

Appropriate engineering and analysis of an existing network will:

Optimize DC locations

- Minimize and match spend to customer weight and margin
- Maximize and meet customer service expectations and MAB dates
- Plan ideal geographic location by product
- Right-size storage footprint
- Reduce risk and COGS

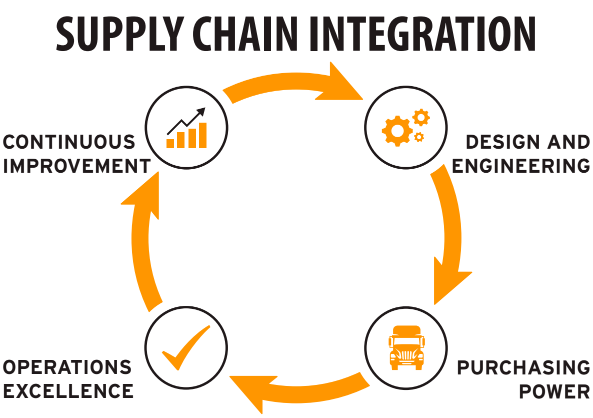
Optimize Customer Assignments

- Plant to DC
- DC to customer
- Reduce service time and cost
- Eliminate or reduce shared delivery points

Optimize Overall Throughput by Product

- Relieve congestion and bottlenecks in flow of information, goods, and finance
- Create stability and predictability in service pattern
- Maximize total ROI, minimize exposure to risk

Optimized network designs can eliminate as much as 65 percent of total spend and set the framework necessary for a solid TMS and order management platform to push you into best-in-class performance. Be sure to work with a provider who has proven experience in network design and optimization. It could be the cost savings–or profit provider–you never knew you needed.



The cost cycle: Where is your focus?

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What You Need to Know About the New SOLAS Regulation

With the introduction of the new Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) regulation, there has been much discussion about what the new ruling entails, and what it will mean for the industry. There has also been a lot of confusion, particularly regarding who is responsible for implementing the changes and enforcing the ruling. To clear things up, we put together some key facts.

What is the New Regulation?

The regulation states that after July 1, 2016, it will be a violation of SOLAS to load a packed container onto a vessel without a Verified Gross Mass (VGM). The regulation was introduced in response to the high number of maritime incidents, where containers of estimated weight were loaded onto a vessel without due planning, causing instability that led to loss of cargo and vessels, injuries, and even fatalities.

Who Will It Affect?

The regulation will be applied globally, affecting all ocean transportation – 95% of all international trade (by volume per transaction). As such, the effects will be felt across the industry. Delays are inevitable as the parties adjust, and the response to containers without a VGM will depend on the terminal and carrier. Trucks may be turned away to prevent congestion within terminals, or terminals may assign storage space in preparation, however either option would still require time to reconfigure the stowage plans before a vessel could be loaded. In many cases, carriers and terminals are addressing this by installing weighing stations to provide this service, ensuring compliance, and profiting from the change.

Who is Responsible?

According to SOLAS, the onus of providing the VGM is on the shipper, defined by the SOLAS convention as 'the legal entity or person named on the bill of lading or sea waybill or equivalent multimodal transport document as shipper, and/or who (or in whose name or on whose behalf) a contract of carriage has been concluded with a shipping company'. Shippers therefore are advised to strive for compliance as soon as possible, and check with carriers and terminals how best to meet the mandate according to their plans. For shippers using a forwarder to pack and weigh the container, forward to the port, and make bookings, the forwarder may provide the verified weight on their behalf – however the shipper will ultimately have responsibility. Carriers and terminals must both strictly refuse to load containers without a VGM, or their ships will not be compliant to flag state and insurance rules. Carriers and terminals are under no obligation to check shipments, however enforcement agencies may implement measures to ensure compliance is being achieved.

How to be Compliant

Any container being loaded onto a vessel must have a VGM, and it is important that the carrier receives this with time to safely plan stowage. Deadlines will differ dependent on the carrier, but it is clear that this will require more time, so prepare for tighter deadlines and allow more time for processing. The VGM can be signed by hand or electronically, and must contain the signature (of a person, not the company) or the last name of the responsible party in capital letters, as well as the verified weight. The VGM can be ascertained by either weighing the container and its contents as a whole (Method 1), or weighing all the cargo (including packaging and dunnage) before packing, and adding this to the tare weight of the container (Method 2). Packed containers entering through a U.S terminal gate via truck (i.e. off-dock rail, local export cargo) can be weighed by the terminal. The carriers can use this weight as the VGM submission by the shipper. Packed containers that move via rail intermodal received at a terminal (i.e. on-dock rail) will already have Gross Cargo Weights, as required under the Intermodal Safe Container Transportation Act (ISCTA). These are passed from the shippers' loading facility to the trucker, and then to the carrier (for inland rail units only) for safe rail transport and terminal handling. The carrier, on behalf of the shipper, will add container tare weight to the Gross Cargo Weight, and submit the total as VGM to loading ports. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has granted a grace period of three months to allow for:

- Permitting packed containers that were loaded onto a vessel before July 1, 2016, and are transshipped on or after July 1, 2016 to be shipped to their final port of discharge without the VGM specified in SOLAS Regulations VI/2.4 to VI/2.6; and
- Providing flexibility to all the stakeholders in containerized transport to refine, if necessary, procedures for documenting, communicating and sharing VGM Information

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Adapters Win in the Multi-Modal, Omni-Channel Fast Lane

In today's digital supply chain era, market-leading shippers in North America are racing to adapt to the growing need for the speed, choice, precision, agility and visibility required to satisfy end customers. Responding to multi-modal and omni-channel demands for the rapid flow of goods, forward-thinking supply chain leaders are leveraging advanced analytics, robust supply chain technology and expertise in domestic (Parcel, LTL, Truckload) and international flows to control and optimize complex networks. Many shippers with traditional, less resilient supply chain infrastructures are experiencing exponential pressure to fill the gaps.

In particular, the accelerated growth of small package, parcel, express shipments (covered in the 2016 Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals' Annual State of Logistics Report for the first time in 27 years) and heavy home delivery highlights the changing burden for shippers organized to operate in a very different system.

This rapid growth is a product of the booming e-commerce realm where the new reality shifts the customer to the pinnacle of the marketplace and requires visibility from domestic or foreign loading docks to the last mile delivery. With the expanding Internet of Things and a growing tendency to widen direct business-to-customer channels, a flexible, adaptive supply chain becomes increasingly important.

Today's supply chain disruptions challenge the sustainability of shippers incapable of providing broad, analytics-based multi-modal and omni-channel solutions. As ongoing macroeconomic trends limit growth opportunities for many segments, businesses increasingly are evaluating their current state and developing strategies to achieve a future state of improved operational performance through enterprise value chain solutions.

Many growth-focused companies are implementing LEAN-based continuous process improvements while looking to mitigate operational, financial and strategic risks. From the back room to the boardroom, the supply chain is receiving more executive attention than ever to keep up with change. Shippers by the thousands are collaborating with Enterprise Logistics Providers to deliver predictive analytics needed to fuel expansion through reductions in logistics-related costs, optimizations in omni-channel fulfillment and improvements in customer delivery experiences.

Partnering to Navigate New Challenges

With no end in sight to e-commerce dominance, successful omni-channel supply chain management is expected to remain a prerequisite for survival. Many shippers find they lack resources to build the required skills quickly enough to nimbly shift from international conveyance to LTL shipment to parcel delivery in an efficient, economical way.

With new challenges on the horizon, innovative logistics providers are seeing a demand surge as companies seek a strategic partner and technology enabler to design and deliver integrated solutions such as multi-modal domestic transportation sourcing, international logistics management, transportation management system (TMS) applications, supply chain analytics and other services to help clients adapt. Beyond traditional freight optimization, shippers seek to enhance operations in all modes, including parcel shipping with advanced analytics to improve network alignment and create value for the end customer. Bundled solutions can close the loop on end-to-end supply chain visibility. Not surprisingly, companies looking to accelerate competencies are choosing to buy versus build supply chain services to adapt exponentially faster and understand total cost to serve B2C and B2B customers to make better, quicker business decisions.

E-commerce revenue is expected to double by 2020. Many businesses focused on fulfilling customer demands in the last-mile/last-minute realm are feverishly adjusting internally to this reality–or are teaming with a logistics provider capable of implementing those changes for them. Competitive agility and adaptability through parcel logistics optimization, parcel auditing, advanced parcel shipping analytics, heavy home delivery and LTL and Truckload optimization help shippers win the multi-modal, omni-channel race to the customer.

Rick Brumett is VP of Client Solutions at Transportation Insight and a recognized supply chain thought leader. With 30 years' industry experience, Brumett has expert-level knowledge of global transportation networks, warehousing and retail distribution. Transportation Insight is an Enterprise Logistics Provider offering end-to-end services including Parcel, LTL and Truckload solutions, technology, big data, supply chain optimization, Extended LEAN® value chain strategy and more. In the 3PL/4PL marketplace, Transportation Insight's intellectual capital and Co-managed Logistics® style of client service have helped the company earn a reputation among clients as an expertise multiplier. The company blends transformational solutions with client expertise to enable North American shippers to accelerate change and grow faster than the competition.

LOGISTICS knowledgebase

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Big Data: Breaking Down Key Information and Putting It to Work

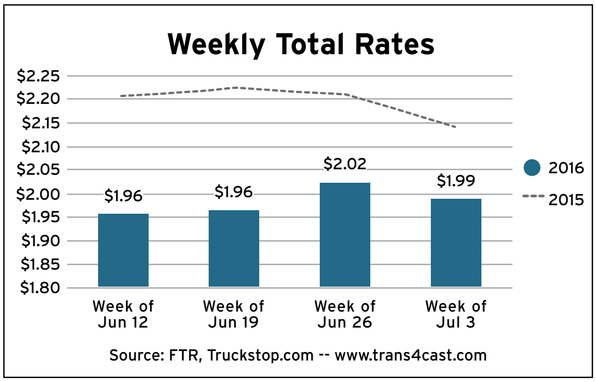
Just mention the word data today and most people will envision something akin to a spinning galaxy full of ones and zeroes that is beyond comprehension.

But data doesn't have to be that way. Big data isn't this giant nebulous of information that only analytical geniuses can understand. Rather, big data is everywhere and when we break it down to the smaller levels, we start to find new types of data that is usable for everyone and that can benefit our customers and build a stronger advantage competitively.

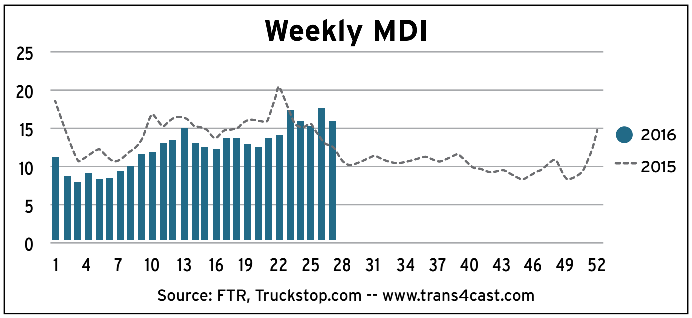
In the trucking industry today, virtually everything is trackable and translates into data. Freight and truck tracking, credit scores, fuel prices, insurance certificates, pricing, service levels–these are just a few examples of areas that are tracked and monitored every day. The key to using big data is to understand what story the data is telling and determine what parts of that story are relevant to you and your organization.

For example, let's look at the spot market. From data gathered by Truckstop.com, we can monitor available capacity, available freight, posted and paid rates, and overall freight movement down to the lane and equipment type. In fact, we can determine where capacity will be tomorrow or next week based on this data. The data also provides us with a look at the pressure in the spot market. This pressure is expressed in the MDI (Market Demand Index). As the MDI rises, capacity is getting tighter and the market proves to be in favor of the carrier. As the MDI drops, the capacity loosens and the market proves to be in favor of the broker.

So what does this all mean? What story is the spot market data telling us? Spot market transactions make up nearly one third of all truckload transactions. The spot market also moves a little quicker than the contract market. The spot market proves to be a good indicator for the pulse of the entire market. Add in some benchmarking of your own internal metrics and you have a better understanding of where the market was, where it is, and where it is going. This gives you the ability to make quicker decisions when tendering loads, negotiating rates and even onboarding carriers.



In 2013, strategist David McJannet described big data as "building new analytic applications based on new types of data, in order to better serve your customers and drive a better competitive advantage." In five years, he said, the description of big data will fit efforts that look nothing like data as we know it today. Even if it is referred to by a different name, he said, the definition of big data will still fit.



In essence, the data is there. Big data is broken down into smaller bits and those bits can be used by companies to structure data and use it in the best way possible to benefit their operations. Understanding data doesn't necessarily call for top analysts or world-class physicists to figure out and understand the information presented. Yes, it takes a little bit of work to understand the data and to put that data into action, but data isn't going away. Data, as with technology, continues to evolve. In five years, the data may tell us a different story of the industry. Will we rely more or less on data's story? You decide.

LOGISTICS knowledgebase

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Is Transportation Management Your Core Competency?

When evaluating your needs for a Transportation Management System (TMS) it's important to look beyond technology and consider who will manage planning and execution. How do you determine if outsourcing to a Managed Service Provider (MSP) will deliver greater value than developing an in-house team?

Making the Decision:

- **Evaluate your core competency –** Is your expertise in transportation and logistics or in another area? To keep your focus on revenue generation and business operations, you may need to consider partners with capability and capacity to tend to other important details, such as delivering product on time, safely, and at the lowest total cost.
- **Leverage an MSP's scale –** Outsourcing to an MSP will most certainly afford you advanced technology at a lower cost. It should also enable you to tap into broader capabilities such as lower freight rates and technology-savvy staff.
- **Quick deployment –** Your company needs the ability to tap into a network that is already up and running, and staffed by fully-trained industry experts. Look for a company that understands the value of a successful implementation and can deliver on commitments. Make sure they have a formal, documented on-boarding process.
- **Ability to ramp up quickly –** Outsourcing managed transportation services enables flexibility by tailoring staffing to your needs (e.g. freight execution, freight audit, bid management). You immediately gain access to experts in each area.

Selecting the Right Partner:

- **Trust –** You need to trust your MSP to make the best decisions on your behalf. Select a partner that you feel has your best interest at heart, aligns with your company's culture, works to thoroughly understand your company's needs and has a process to continually evaluate, adjust and improve. Always check references. Your provider's service to their other customers is a key indicator of the service they will provide you.
- **Service –** How and when your product arrives is the measure your customer uses to evaluate your performance. You need a transportation service provider that works as hard as you do. They are front line representatives of your company. Select a partner that understands their vital role and offers more than simply making phone calls to your carriers. A partner should provide solutions when your business faces challenges and optimize your transportation so you provide high quality, consistent service to your customers at a lower cost.
- **Process –** Make sure your partner outlines the "how" and fully understands your current process and your business. Without a formal business review process, they are unable to do that. In addition, your partner should document the new process through new SOPs and routing guides. This defined process should outline your agreement so they understand decision-making authority, the process for the day-to-day activities, and how to handle exceptions.
- **Tailored Solution –** In today's environment, there is an abundance of technology platforms with very competitive offerings. Make sure to select a company that understands that your needs may not be out-of-the-box. Invest time with your partner by sharing your company's goals and current business challenges. In return you should receive a solution that addresses your concerns and also supports your objectives. One solution does not fit everyone.
- **Knowledge & Agility –** Finally, make sure your MSP is agile. Ask about hiring and on-going training to ensure their staff is current with the latest industry and technology trends. If the MSP does not understand the complex and dynamic nature of logistics, they will be challenged to answer your questions and advance your business. And then, they are just a software provider. You are looking for an expert, a true logistics service provider.

LOGISTICS knowledgebase

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Become an Extension of Your Client's Brand

As entities responsible for brokering appropriate carrier rates, ensuring accurate quantities of orders, and guaranteeing high quality of products, third-party logistics providers are extensions of companies' brands. The functions 3PLs perform help shape their clients' outwardly facing reputation. Here are the most effective ways to become an extension of your client's brand.

Cost Savings

Carrier Brokerage – Save your client money so it can pass along savings to its own customers. Your 3PL can do this by brokering the best possible carrier rates for your client, whether your business uses an effective, built-in Transportation Management System (TMS) that automatically sets up auctions for carriers to bid for business, uses load planners to broker carriers, or some combination of both. Carrier brokerage is a win-win for your 3PL and client, adding profit to your 3PL's bottom line, saving the client on overall transportation spend, and securing future business with the client, provided the carrier performs well.

Regarding carrier performance and accountability, a TMS with capabilities to track and report carrier performance, including actual delivery and pickup times, can provide value for both your 3PL and your client. Consider a TMS with these functions.

Deliveries and pick-ups made on time, accompanied by a friendly demeanor and professional attitude, reflect your client's ability to handle last-minute and well-ahead-of-time requests.

Storage Space – Be willing to accommodate a client's need for multiple pricing options, such as storage costs by the pallet, square foot, linear foot, or pound. The flexibility might make the client's rate contract more complicated, but it will allow the client flexibility it can pass on to its own customers when fulfilling orders. Today's competitive retail market demands that companies fulfill orders rapidly and accurately. Allowing a company latitude in their storage space options helps it remain competitive—and well-branded—in the e-commerce industry.

Efficiency

Product Put-away – A 3PL's greatest asset is its employees. Material handlers who care about their jobs will commit to putting products away safely and accurately, using "First-In, First Out" methods, directed put-away technology, advanced barcode scanning, or some combination thereof. Treat your employees well, providing them with a fulfilling, safe, and profitable workplace, and they will treat your customers' products as if they were their own. Equally important is the concept of instilling in your employees the urgency with which products need to be put away in safe storage spaces. Careful handling results in high-quality products shipping out to the client's customers, cementing your client's reputation as a reliable brand.

Order Fulfillment – Similar to careful product put-away, quick-acting and motivated employees will work hard to ensure the client's customers receive their retail products as soon as and in the best condition possible. Provide employees with the technologies they need, like hip-mounted shipping label scanners and printers, RFGen, touchscreen tablet inventory systems and more, to fulfill orders. Some e-commerce companies promise customers same-day shipping—or even same-day delivery! These changing expectations in the retail industry put additional pressure on 3PLs and their employees to fulfill orders in an organized and appropriately prioritized fashion. Your e-commerce customer will thank you when its customers write glowing online reviews praising the company's prompt delivery times.

Customer Service

Saving your client money and fulfilling its business rules arguably are the biggest components of the company's customer service, allowing your client to brand itself as a competitively priced "rapid responder" in its respective industry. However, your 3PL's own face time with the client is important, too. Provide your clients with dedicated client service representatives, account managers or both. These professionals can help your client change aspects of its supply chain that are not working, such as observing flaws in its order entry system or noticing defects in shipping materials the client uses to ship orders. Communication and a pair of human eyes–or several–watching over clients' inbound and outbound products, whether virtually through an Order Management System or in person as a warehouse facility manager, add personal touches to your relationship with your client.

Additionally, automated programs can catch mistakes but lack the analytical ability to determine why mistakes are happening and prevent them from occurring in the future. Less shipping and storage mistakes deeper in your client's supply chain, starting with your 3PL's services, mean happier end customers touting your client's name as a leader–"the best"–in its industry.

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Survey Says: Invest in Warehouse Technology

It's no secret that e-commerce is changing the landscape of warehousing. Forrester Research estimates online sales in the U.S. will increase 56 percent—from $335 billion to $523 billion—over the next five years. Coupled with ever-growing consumer expectations for instant gratification, the pressure on warehouses is set to grow exponentially.

So how do industry leaders plan to keep up with these unprecedented demands? The short answer is technology investment. A recent survey of more than 1300 IT and operations warehouse professionals across 12 countries revealed some compelling trends.

By the year 2020:

- 75 percent of decision makers plan to adopt more modern, full-featured warehouse management systems (WMS).
- 73 percent plan to equip staff with advanced visibility, barcode scanning and/or computing technologies.
- 76 percent anticipate investing more in real-time location systems that track inventory and assets throughout the warehouse.

The numbers are clear. If you're not planning to upgrade your warehouse technology, you're in the minority. Let's delve deeper into this survey, conducted anonymously for Zebra, and explore what the warehouse of tomorrow might look like.

Leaner, More Streamlined Operations

According to the Zebra Warehouse Vision Report, 76 percent of businesses are planning to increase the number of warehouses and distribution centers, while 61 percent plan to reduce space expansions and relocate existing structures. This would result in a greater number of smaller facilities, spread farther apart. In addition, 58 percent plan to invest in warehouse/truck loading automation technology.

The intent? Slash transportation costs (a major factor driving change according to 43 percent of respondents), speed up delivery times (critical to 41 percent of those surveyed), and take full advantage of new supplier and partner locations (important to 32 percent of decision makers).

A More Productive, Connected Workforce

Forty-six percent of respondents cited labor performance/productivity and order turnaround time as the largest order picking and fulfillment issues, with order accuracy just behind at 41 percent. Considering that picking and fulfillment typically comprise 70 percent of a facility's operating costs, it's no wonder industry leaders are laser-focused on making improvements in this area.

Equipping staff with advanced technologies such as wearables, mobile handheld computers and tablets can significantly impact your bottom line. For instance, multi-modal wearable solutions take advantage of the full spectrum of workers' capabilities by:

- Enabling voice-directed, hands-free picking
- Allowing staff to view items and pick locations on screen
- Simplifying barcode and RFID tag scanning
- Facilitating easy input of information via touchscreen

The result? According to recent data, multi-modal wearable solutions can improve picking and fulfillment productivity by 15 percent and reduce errors by 39 percent.

Complete Visibility

The survey revealed that 62 percent of warehouse professionals plan to invest in the Internet of Things (IoT) to gain unprecedented visibility into every facet of the supply chain.

As the application of the IoT, radio frequency identification (RFID) technology gives managers the ability to know the precise location of everything from individual pallets to cases to SKUs at any given moment. No wonder over half of survey respondents plan to more than double their usage of RFID for cycle counts and inventory validation by 2020.

As retailers strive to merge physical and digital operations, cut transportation costs and improve efficiency, the transition to best-of-breed, real-time warehouse management systems is nearly ubiquitous. But perhaps the most enticing aspect of the warehouse of tomorrow is that it can be achieved today. See the full Zebra Warehouse Vision Report to learn more (www.zebra.com/warehousing2020).

Offering an unparalleled portfolio of enterprise-level solutions, from RFID, barcoding and mobile computing to wearables, printers and software, Zebra is committed to making businesses as smart and connected as the world we live in. www.zebra.com/warehouse

LOGISTICS knowledgebase

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3PL Customer Service Specialization

Defining customer service can be difficult. Measuring it is even harder. Sometimes ambiguous, customer service is more than being courteous and helpful, it's also about being knowledgeable. To solve complex problems, and to do so with speed, a 3PL must know a shipper's needs inside and out.

While intricacies of certain shippers and receivers will always be relevant, industry expertise is the most impactful way to positively affect customer service requirements. This is a growing concern as changes in consumer demands, technology expectations, and trucking regulations are pushing for a major shift in transportation toward niche specialization.

So don't settle for lackluster customer service. Today's marketplace is bursting with 3PLs to choose from. Make sure the one you work with sets internal standards that align their performance expectations to the expectations your customers have for you, and that specialize in the knowledge areas you need. Here are a few things to consider:

Culture

Look for a 3PL that has a service-first culture–one that looks beyond singular transactions to provide value to customers every day and live out its purpose in every interaction.

Determine whether that stated culture is truly driving decision making, or if it is just sales-speak. Are the people serving you empowered to meet your needs at all costs, or is wide profit margin the primary objective and performance measure? Companies that internally reward customer service are dedicated to making it a priority.

Also, find someone who values the same things you do. Without organizational alignment, partnership is just a word. If misaligned on core business ideals, it will be almost impossible to see eye-to-eye on customer service standards.

Communication

How do you define customer service excellence? This has to be an ongoing conversation between 3PLs and their customers. With so many different ways to outline, partners must ensure they are on the same page.

Honesty and trust are huge factors, and only providers that truly value partnership are motivating their staff to stick to these standards. Many 3PLs push their people to show growth at all costs, which can motivate their business development teams to say "yes" to all asks, even if they are unequipped to service a particular need. Honesty doesn't mean delivering the pricing and scope-of-work assessments that a customer wants to hear. It means providing achievable expectations on sustainable pricing to ensure the client's best interest is priority number one.

Integrity is also important. Look for service providers who are accountable to their own mistakes, and who proactively communicate potential issues. No matter the situation or which party is to blame, your 3PL should be about identifying resolutions, not avoiding ownership.

Equally important is evaluating the level of transparency in your transportation costs and visibility into performance metrics. Is your provider communicating with you enough? Do they have technology solutions in place that give you access to performance data? This could look like daily or hourly updates on order statuses, live tracking, not having to constantly ask for information, or availability of deeper KPIs.

Measurement

Surveys are the most traditional way to evaluate customer service performance, but continually asking customers for feedback can get cumbersome.

For more regular measurement, 3PLs can leverage hard data. Once you communicate what customer service looks like, set well-defined metrics around those standards and regularly evaluate whether they are being met. Is average response time within the parameter set? Do representatives provide updates and proactive solutions for all possible issues? Do you have the levels of visibility you require?

In today's transportation marketplace, demand that your service providers meet your customer service standards and know your business. Specialists who are service-oriented will consistently meet, and often exceed, your needs because the two of you will be working toward common goals. Just make sure to set those goals in advance and continually evaluate.