

Making Your Miles Count: Let your Name be your Brand

“Choosing A Trucking Company” isn’t a one time choice for successful independent operator.. The choice to serve a carrier is an ongoing decision to work with a repeat customer. It goes much deeper than no/yes or walk away/sign.

A successful operator continually looks to find a healthy balance between better serving their customer and personal profitability. Once at the carrier the operator must find lanes and loops that produce the best returns for himself while creating value for their repeat customer. It’s not always just lanes and loops but also getting to know its many specific needs. Do the carrier customers need special assistance? What consideration or service does the shipper/receiver interested in?

Building a strong and healthy relationship WITHIN the carrier is building the independent operators “brand name” (which is usually the actual name of the operator). Building yourself into a high level operator in a payroll list of drivers takes time, sacrifice, patience and commitment. Reputation and notoriety is built over time, brick by brick, month by month and year over year.

With a positive reputation the operator has the highest chance of producing the greatest return on investment and effort. During down/slow times a good reputation can protect an operator from layoffs (contract cancellation) or squeezing of revenue to the point of unrealistic sacrifice. Building a brand name and maximizing your potential through reinvestment should be everyone’s goal.

All carriers live or die by their reputation. Anyone can calculate a carriers reputation by summing the collective reputation of all their drivers and staff... but mostly the drivers. In the trucking industry often times the name of the founder becomes the name of the carrier. Some call the industry ego based because of it. I believe its based on reputation... not ego. That is why (in my opinion) ethics and integrity is integral to the trucking industry. It’s what builds and sustains long term strength and prosperity.

Too many operators (and sometimes carriers) would rather just sell their service as a “no name” or generic brand, nothing special just the cheapest service from A to B. It’s not the end of the world business model but operators must remember they don’t have access to volume business (especially now with ELD’s) like any “no name” carrier is trying to capture.

With integrity being the foundation of an industry I was reminded of the famous saying by courts all across the free world. “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?” Building truth in a society filled with deception is critical to building your brand name. The saying (quote) is broken down to three parts: the truth (which equals truth), the whole truth (which implies that sometimes less than the truth is being communicated), and finally nothing but the truth (which implies that things are added to the truth that distracts from what the truth is). For those algebra geeks out there, here is the formula for that saying:

$$T = T$$

$$T \neq T - x$$
$$T \neq T + x$$

Building a brand name requires the truth.... the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Ultimately meaning everyone is taking responsibility for their actions. If someone doesn't, reputation suffers.

Even though reputation is built brick by brick, month over month, year over year, destruction of reputation can happen all in one day. Most destruction comes in the form of attitude but somewhere in the situation someone is simply not taking responsibility for behavior or performance. The only true solution is apologizing and making things right. If a person will humble them self they can even repair their reputation to a stronger brand name than before. However, that takes courage and an internal will to build themselves into something truly great.

If operators don't intend to take responsibility for their actions than choosing the generic "no name brand" is probably the best model to have. Just remember, if a customer has a choice to use a good brand name verses a generic no name... chances are they will use the brand name. If a customer needs to release someone... they will always release a no name brand before a brand name.

Either way, its your business, your choice.

About the Author:

Robert D. Schepher is a leading Accountant and Consultant exclusively serving the Lease/Owner operator industry in Canada. His first book in the Making Your Miles Count series "taxes, taxes, taxes" was released in 2007. His second book "Choosing a Trucking company" is the most in-depth analysis of the independent operator industry today. He has a Master degree (MBA) in financial management and has been serving the industry since he and his wife came off the road in 1993. His dedication, commitment and strong opinions can be read and heard in many articles and seminars. You can find him at www.makingyourmilescount.com or 1-877-987-9787.

no name®