



Let Your Name Be Your Brand

Choosing a trucking company isn't a once in a lifetime choice for successful independent operators. The choice to work for a carrier is an ongoing decision to work with a repeat customer. It goes much deeper than yes/no or sign/walk away.

A successful independent operator continually looks to find a healthy balance between better serving their customer (the carrier) and personal profitability. Once at the carrier, the operator must find lanes and loops that produce the best returns for himself/herself while creating value for their repeat customer (the carrier). It's not always just lanes and loops but also getting to know their many specific needs. Do the carrier's customers need special assistance? What consideration or service is 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; mile by mile, 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 carrier's 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 it's 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 it means everyone is taking responsibility for their actions. If someone doesn't, reputation suffers.

Even though reputation is built mile by mile, month over month and 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 to apologize and make things right. If a person will humble themselves, 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 then choosing the generic "no name brand" carrier is probably the best model to have. Just remember, if a customer has a choice to use a good brand name versus 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, it's your business, your choice.

About the Author:

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