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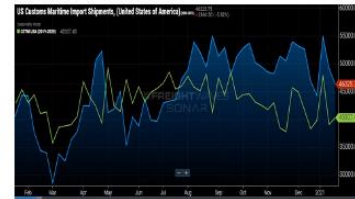
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News

Leveraging new technology to source and secure carrier capacity

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By Dan Cicerchi, VP and general manager, transportation management at Descartes

Freight brokers of all sizes have always faced fairly common challenges in securing carriers, but it can be particularly tough in today's environment with rapidly changing volumes, shifting distribution models and a prolonged driver shortage. Add in COVID and other unexpected sources of supply chain disruption and brokers can find it exceptionally difficult to find the right carriers for new customers, lanes, modes and geographies. This environment can also make it tough to be strategic about the carriers you choose.

Seeking out capacity the old way—countless phone calls, spreadsheets, undocumented tribal knowledge, physical maps and word of mouth while scouring multiple carrier portals and load boards with stale or unverified data— is chronically inefficient. Tendering and tracking loads once you do have a carrier is also time consuming. These outdated manual practices have long placed a drain on broker staff, hindering efficiency and growth. Cloud-based intelligent capacity sourcing solutions, however, provide brokers with tools and capabilities to overcome the traditional drawbacks of manual practices.

Adding technology can be easier than you think

While some brokers jumped in early to adopt automated capacity sourcing solutions, some have stayed on the sidelines for various reasons. Change management may be disruptive or the learning curve may potentially create more work in the short term, especially if office staff is already spread thin. There's also the added expense to consider.

Today's solutions, however, can and should be possible to implement cost-effectively, quickly and without disrupting your business. Best-in-class options integrate with existing transportation management systems (TMS) and offer flexible subscription models based on number of users and other factors. Additionally, like so many modern applications, they tend to be visually appealing, highly intuitive and easy to learn for users of all levels.

With the right technology partner, you can expect a relatively quick, seamless deployment. In fact, with proper advance planning, some organizations are up and running in a matter of weeks. Most brokers who go this route often wonder why they waited so long.

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Remember, some organizations are up and running in a matter of weeks. Most brokers who see the results often wonder

The value of advanced capacity sourcing capabilities

Just as industries like travel, real estate and others have been able to grow and become more efficient because of technology and connected sources of information, brokers and carriers alike can operate far more efficiently when they have access to consolidated, current transportation data from connected networks at scale.

Leading solutions today allow brokers to view capacity across multiple carriers at once, and then easily certify and onboard new, quality carriers that fit a company's lane specialties. Because capacity sourcing solutions are cloud-based and updated continually, you'll know you're getting the most current data available. Leading technologies also provide brokers with the ability to:

- Quickly identify available capacity within a core network of carriers—and with other carriers they may not have historically used
- Book carriers faster with fewer calls, better rates and improved margins
- Build strong carrier relationships and increase their utilization with fewer deadheads and more backhauls
- Reduce manual processes for staff, allowing them to focus on higher value work for the business
- Reduce service failures
- Leverage verified, current data collected from actual truck moves, electronic logging devices (ELD) and other freight visibility tools

Across the industry, brokers are seeing real business results. Connie Morgan, Director, TL Pricing and Procurement at third-party logistics (3PL) provider Sunset Transportation, explains the value of strategic capacity sourcing to the company: "The Descartes MacroPoint capacity tool has been the biggest factor in keeping us ahead of the game, given the changes in the current carrier environment. We've had wins finding carriers that were not set up in our system that turned out to be wonderful assets to use on big projects that we wouldn't have otherwise known existed."

John Sutton, Manager, Business Analysis at Sunset Transportation, adds: By exponentially expanding our trusted network through the carrier co-op, we're using Descartes MacroPoint to cover as many as 12 loads per day and have activated approximately 4,500 carriers to date. We save time and money through better rates, fewer deadheads, and more backhauls."

For companies considering capacity sourcing technology, "table stakes" features and functions include:

- *Ability to visualize market conditions.* Most solutions offer a management dashboard that lets you see key information in one view, such as available capacity for open loads both inside and outside your carrier network. The most user-friendly solutions tend to offer heat-map type views of open loads and let you easily review the most viable carriers and carrier history.

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- **Online offer management.** You should be able to receive and manage offers easily, manage individual vehicles, negotiate with your network, and accept offers.
- **Streamlined online communications.** Within the platform you should be able to quickly target carriers using capacity sourcing functions, choose multiple carriers for offers, and then message them readily within the system without having to go offline to phone or email.

The question of data sharing

Some brokers may be concerned about competitors having visibility into their customer information on a shared technology platform. They understandably don't want their prime carriers lured away by other brokers.

The fact is, however, that many brokers are already posting to load boards, blasting emails and updating multiple portals. So, they are already sharing data that isn't shielded from view. While data is valuable, it's limited to transactions within your network. Pooling data in a secure network with trusted partners provides more chances for all participants to find opportunities, which leads to better rates.

The benefits can far outweigh the risks, especially considering the security features built into today's capacity sourcing solutions but be sure to do your homework. Ask specific questions to ensure strategic carriers will be protected and the data you contribute to the network is double-blind (e.g., shipper name/address and which broker is moving the load should be shielded with a few exceptions.)

You can also ask how the solution helps network participants protect their lanes and carriers and how information is shared selectively when coverage is more of a challenge. By asking these types of questions, you can better understand how your data is shared for your strategic benefit while still being protected appropriately.

Take steps now to improve your competitive edge

It's a great time to step back, evaluate your current processes, and ask a few questions: *Do you have some room to expand your toolkit? Are there areas where you could stand to modernize? Have you been sitting on the sidelines because you dread an implementation? Could you be managing your carrier relationships more strategically? Could your staff be focused on more important tasks?*

The most successful brokers are taking full advantage of new capacity sourcing technologies to unlock previously trapped capacity, cover more loads, build stronger carrier relationships, and reduce costs. By making time to assess current practices and evaluating what the market has to offer, you can put today's technology to work for your business and be ready for what's next.

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