

Tricks To Finding The Best Loads

By Timothy D. Brady



Something today which haunts most small motor carriers is, "Where can I find decent-paying loads on a consistent basis for all of the trucks I operate?"

The answer is relatively simple; the process requires a plan and staying dedicated to that plan. Keep in mind this is a multi-level attack which includes developing a niche, developing a lane, having a dedicated number of Direct Ship Customers, an exclusive list of quality brokers, and knowing how to work a load board to your advantage. And make sure you know everything about the loads within your niche, which move in the lane(s) you've chosen.



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Let's run through the numbers on this.

Step one in finding loads is having a specific niche and lane in which you operate. Trying to be all things to all shippers wherever their loads go will make finding the best loads extremely difficult. The object here is to know everything within your niche and lane: who's shipping what, when, where and how often. The only way you, as a small motor carrier, can accomplish this is by narrowing your focus to a manageable level. If you operate only one truck, then your lane needs to be equal to what you can haul in a week to ten days, both outbound and inbound. This makes sure you'll stay on top of all shipments within your niche and lane.

Step two is develop at least a pair of Direct Ship Customers in your niche and lane, one outbound and one inbound, for each truck you operate. Preplan loads weeks in advance, so at each end of your lane you have a shipment already scheduled to head you back to home or other points in your hauling lane.

This isn't a perfect world. Murphy's Law of Finding Freight says you very seldom find a Direct Ship Customer with a load right back to your terminal from the location to which your outbound load is delivered. Therefore, you may need to run a lane that is a triangle or a square. This means you have an outbound from your home terminal, Point A, to Point B, but in order to return to Point A you may have to haul a load from Point B to Point C and then from Point C back to your home terminal, Point A. Your goal needs to be an additional Direct Ship Customer load at either Point B or Point C, which helps you to return to the home terminal. Steps three and four will show you how to fill in the gaps between your direct shipper loads.

Step three is developing business relationships with a handful of quality brokers within your niche and lane. This becomes a major position in your load strategy. By knowing and working with the same brokers on a continual basis, they become as valuable as any Direct Ship Customer. They are there to help you get the loads you require to move you to the location where your next load is waiting. You treat them just as you would your most important customer. If they have special requests, you bend over backwards to accommodate them. (Remember to focus on your required revenue needs, so when you do a favor for a broker, the net result benefits both your company and him. This is not charity; it's "scratching each others' backs.") The more you invest in this relationship, the more valuable you become to the broker. Think of it as depositing money into a savings account: the more you put in the account, the more you can withdraw when it's necessary. Say one of your Direct Ship Customers stops having you haul shipments. This is when you'll need the broker to find loads to replace those lost by the Direct Ship Customer's departure. When, not if, this happens,

the deposits with your handful of brokers will pay off without missing a step by having the loads you need to keep your revenue flowing and your trucks rolling.

Step four is having a quality, multi-service load board at your beck and call. Load boards have a wealth of information that would be difficult to duplicate anywhere else. Depending on the level of service you choose, you have options to post available trucks with space and weight, check the credit and Days to Pay of the brokers or shippers posting loads. You can check fuel prices, plan routes, access load-to-truck ratios and total postings for every state, plus current truckload rates for lanes across the U.S. and Canada. But more important, a quality load board becomes your fourth leg in stabilizing your load planning capabilities. A quality load board is your barometer for what's happening in your lane and your niche. It is also your stopgap for being sure your trucks are maximized with the most tonnage available. With a load board, you locate loads more quickly than by calling multiple brokers or shippers. This is very important when a load falls apart or gets cancelled. Load boards are also very useful when you have space available and need to fill the truck to maximize your revenue. And of course the load board becomes your financial life preserver when a customer or broker cancels a load or worse their hauling contract and you need loads to fill the trucks affected by the loss of shipments.

Important: For this plan to work, it is imperative you coordinate and use all four tiers. You must:

- Be focused on your chosen niche and lane at all times.
- Continually improve the customer service you provide your Direct Ship Customers, and always be developing new ones in the wings.
- Nurture and work your relationships with your selected stable of brokers.
- Develop your skills in working a load board, so there is no learning curve necessary to get you up to speed on finding the best loads.

Remember, there will always be customers, brokers and loads, which are there and then—they're gone. With the ebb and flow of the economy and individual needs of the business and industries you serve, having a multi-tier plan for finding the best loads through different channels is what will keep your truck rolling with top-drawer shipments, providing you with the revenue you need.

Finding the best loads is a daunting task, but with careful planning; the right customers, brokers, and mastering a load board, the task doesn't need to be something that haunts you day and night.

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