

High Tech Meets High Touch, at General Transportation Services

“High tech and high touch.” That sums up the distinctive approach of General Transportation Services. The Portland, Oregon-based freight broker and 3PL prides itself on outstanding service to approximately 2,000 shipping customers, matching their freight to dry vans, flatbeds and reefers from 8,000 independent carriers across North America.

The “high tech” aspect of the business is provided by the Keypoint Transportation Software transportation management software and its integrated, companion products, Imaging Suite and TransCore DAT’s Load Board. The “high touch” is an attitude as well as an operational guideline.

“No matter what the customer asks, we can find a way to do it,” said Dean Altenhofen, who has served as the company’s General Manager since 2004. That attentiveness to customer service has helped General Transportation Services to grow from a local partnership in Portland to a national concern with six regional offices. They match freight with dry vans, flatbeds and reefers, both as a broker and as a third-party logistics provider with exclusive customer relationships.

The Keypoint transportation management solution (TMS) provides the high-tech support for the company’s operations – with only three people in the back office, processing freight bills, invoicing customers and paying carriers. General had the same staff level when it opened its doors in 1990, but today, “a lot of customers send us orders over the Internet, and that feeds right into our TMS system,” said Richard Fink, one of General Transportation’s three partners. This direct approach, which is enabled by Keypoint, saves time, increases responsiveness and improves accuracy.

“High touch” is also an important element of General Transportation’s carrier relationships. “Our goal is to talk to every driver every day,” Altenhofen said. “We have hundreds of shipments in motion, but that is our goal.”

“We document that in Check Call,” said Altenhofen, referring to a screen in Keypoint. “It automatically stamps the name of the user and what time they entered the data,” he said. The system also tracks the location and availability of vehicles, so when a customer order comes in, General is usually quick to find the right truck.

The company’s high-touch approach succeeds where a purely high-tech method might fail. Fink recalled an instance when “a customer called and said he wasn’t able to cover a load for three weeks. We referred it to our office in Tennessee, and we had it covered in five minutes,” Fink said. “That’s because we talk to the carriers. The customer just sent e-mails, but it’s easy for a carrier to reject an e-mail if it doesn’t fit into that day’s profile,” he concluded.

At a glance

General Transportation Services, Inc.
Portland, Oregon
www.generaltransportation.com



General Transportation Services, Inc.

Goal:

Improve operational efficiency to position the company for growth without adding to three-person back-office staff.

Scope:

Non-asset-based broker and 3PL founded in 1990, now has six offices nationwide, with 2,000 customers and 8,000 carriers. Dry vans, flatbeds, intermodal and reefers.

Solution:

Keypoint Transportation Software, combined with Imaging Suite and TransCore® DAT® Load Board.

Results:

The company is poised for continued growth, as the transportation market rebounds.

The company extends its connection with carriers to the drivers themselves. “We have the drivers’ cell numbers, and we have someone on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” said Fink. If a problem arises, he said, “the driver is to call us. Then we immediately call the shipper,” he continued. “When you have people and machines and weather, things are going to go wrong. In those cases, we try to execute the perfect service failure,” Fink said.

What is the impact on customer relationships?

“It is very positive,” said Altenhofen, the general manager. He noted, however, that there is also an inherent challenge when the bar is set so high. Altenhofen gave an example of a customer who sat down with General’s management for a year-end review and focused on a single service failure. While Altenhofen was glad to know the company had provided an entire year of excellent customer service with only one exception, he strives to improve even on that record.

“You can win eight million times, but if you miss once, you don’t know what the consequences are for the customer,” he cautioned.

Maintaining a near-flawless service record is a significant achievement, because company operations are dispersed, diversified and complex. Altenhofen credits Keypoint for keeping the company on track.

“Our brokers can go to one screen and get all the information they need on the orders, on the history, the carriers, to make the matches that they need,” he said. Altenhofen himself relies on the management analysis screens in Keypoint to keep an eye on the day-to-day operations, while General Transportation’s partners and accounting staff make use of the Imaging Suite to handle important documents and monitor receivables, payables and overall cash flow.

“This is our whole world. We don’t utilize five or six different systems to get our work done. We use Keypoint.”

– Dean Altenhofen, General Manager,
General Transportation Services, Inc.

“I can’t imagine doing it without Keypoint. I can’t run the business without it.”

– Dean Altenhofen, General Manager,
General Transportation Services, Inc.

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The logo for TransCore, featuring the word "TRANSCORE" in a blue, sans-serif font. A curved line arches over the letters "A", "N", and "S", starting above the "A" and ending above the "S".