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A Fearless Future: How to protect your supply chain

Managing a private fleet in the food services industry presents unique challenges that are not experienced by most other private fleet operators. Many companies have a hard time meeting the regulatory requirements while retaining drivers to keep their fleet running smoothly. Brian Webb is the Senior Vice President of Business Development at J.B. Hunt Transport. Among other areas, he oversees the food services specialty for dedicated customers. He has worked closely with hundreds of companies that face these challenges.

Q&A

Food service jobs are among the most difficult driving positions to fill and traditionally demand higher pay. What actions can companies take to protect their labor force and attract new talent?

Great question. The driver shortage has wreaked havoc on companies that employ class A CDL drivers who execute food product deliveries into stores and restaurants. Engaging in a wage war with companies competing for labor is not a long-term solution. We must challenge the status quo of the traditional manual unloading process or a ramp and dolly delivery. Working with shippers and suppliers, we evaluate more efficient delivery methods utilizing palletized shipments, power pallet jacks and other mechanized material-handling tools to reduce the manual requirements of these deliveries. We believe that these changes coupled with an appropriate compensation package will extend the careers of our current labor force and attract new talent moving forward.

What value does a third-party dedicated fleet bring to a company in the food and restaurant industry?

Operating a fleet becomes a bigger challenge every year. Ever-increasing regulations and accident and injury liability exposure force companies to re-evaluate fleet ownership more and more. Many companies are not comfortable growing their private fleet or are seeking an alternative that has the same branded touch of their existing fleet. A dedicated fleet is essentially a private fleet management solution. These fleets allow the company to maintain control of the delivery without sacrificing service quality.

Is it critical to have industry specialists in food logistics manage the accounts for food and restaurant customers, or does the skillset from other areas, such as retail, transfer?

Food safety and product handling expertise cannot be compromised. While I would acknowledge that there is a meaningful amount of those skillsets that are transferable, I don't believe that companies will have the appetite to train a new service provider in those skillsets because of the risks associated with mishandling food products. We realize there is a different level of service expectation from a restaurant or store owner.

What challenges can over-the-threshold food delivery present for private fleets? What can a dedicated fleet provider do to assist with these challenges?

Again, our biggest challenge today is the shortage of qualified drivers in the marketplace followed by various risk exposures related to operating those delivery fleets. There are pressures being applied from every angle of the transportation business. Equipment and labor costs are outpacing price increases. The Food Safety Modernization Act and provisions in the highway bill, currently making its way through Congress, have added and will continue to add safety and accountability measures that will also add costs. A dedicated fleet provider must be equipped to take on these challenges and provide solutions.

For information about finding an expert 3PL for private fleet management, please visit www.jbhunt.com/dcs.

