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## Industry Insiders, Customer Say Transplace Here to Stay

Sun, Feb 16, 2003

By Ethan C. Nobles

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SPRINGDALE -- The head of the Arkansas Trucking Association believes Lowell's Transplace has hit the nail on the head with a plan to handle expensive, administrative chores for trucking firms.

"The services they are developing seem so innovative today, but I think they'll be accepted as the norm in the next three to five years," said Lane Kidd, president of Arkansas Trucking.

Arkansas Trucking and Transplace -- a Plano, Texas, firm with offices in Lowell -- have entered into a marketing agreement. Under the terms of the plan, Arkansas Trucking will recommend Transplace to companies needing drug and alcohol testing for employees.

"I think this program is going to be received really well by trucking companies in the industry," Kidd said. "The cost is very affordable."

Transplace, which opened in 2000, has a number of functions. The firm's Fleet Services Group handles administrative chores for carriers by taking care of everything from making sure truck parts are delivered to arranging for drug testing.

"They are just building on their core competencies. It's a natural evolution of their strengths," said Jim Crowell, executive director of the Supply Chain Management Research Center at the University of Arkansas. "They are very good at listening to their customers and identifying trends."

The primary function of Transplace, however, is logistics. The firm has contracts with thousands of trucking firms and is hired by shippers to match freight with space.

Kidd said both shippers and trucking firms benefit from the arrangement.

"They have been able to really lower the cost for shipping and provide high-quality freight for clients," he said. "That's really the key."

Kidd said Transplace has five equity owners which are all large trucking firms --

Lowell's J.B. Hunt Transport Services, Covenant Transport, Swift Transportation Co., U.S. Xpress Enterprises and Werner Enterprises. Because of the firm's ownership and the proximity of its largest office to the J.B. Hunt headquarters, Kidd said Transplace had to fight the perception it simply existed to funnel freight to its owners.

"I think Transplace has surprised many observers in the industry," he said. "They have been able to overcome the perception that the company will only represent the owners."

Richard Scharchburg, distribution operations manager for BP Solay Polyethylene North America in Houston, said his company has been very pleased with Transplace's services.

BP Solay manufactures plastic discs which are sold to clients and converted into items such as automotive parts, pill bottles and milk jugs. Scharchburg said 90 percent of his firm's goods are carried by rail or bulk trucks dedicated to providing service to only a few clients.

He said Transplace takes care of the remaining 10 percent -- packaged goods heading to smaller clients without large storage facilities. Also, BP Solay relies on Transplace's quick response time when it become necessary to make an emergency shipment to clients in danger of running out of supplies.

"The most flexible delivery option for us is to use Transplace," Scharchburg said.

He said BP Solay used to have four people on staff to take care of the shipping Transplace now handles. Because of Transplace's effectiveness, Scharchburg said his company was able to pass the "back office" administrative chores of handling the shipping to the logistics firm and eliminate three jobs.

"At this point now, it's down to a little of my time and a little bit of time from a person who works for me," he said. "It's very convenient. It makes life much easier for us. ... We saw a lot of what we call back-office savings."

Scharchburg said Transplace has housed two of its employees in the BP Solay office.

"They're very easy to do business with," he said. "When there's a problem, they're right down the hall."

Kidd said Transplace certainly saves money for its customers, but it also benefits carriers. He said a problem in the trucking industry is the empty miles concept -- driving an unloaded truck back to a terminal after a shipment has been delivered.

Transplace, he said, can typically find freight for a trucker wanting to avoid logging empty miles. Kidd said, typically, a load of freight is just a phone call away as Transplace has the technology to analyze the needs of shippers quickly and find a carrier in need of freight.

Crowell said Transplace recruits students heavily at the UA, adding he believes Transplace is in business for the long-haul. Crowell said Transplace is represented on the Supply Chain Management's board and has been a great help to students and professors studying logistics.

"We, obviously, feel pretty good about them," he said.



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