

Delivering the Goods

Coquitlam, B.C.-based Clark Freightways has a lot in common with the grocery industry, which it has catered to ever since founder Jim Clark hauled peaches from the Okanagan in the late 1950s. Like the grocery sector, the trucking business is one of extremely small profit margins, due partly to the rising cost of fuel and heavy reliance on manpower. Plus, the competition is more ferocious than ever.

And yet, Clark Freightways has grown to the point where its fleet of 175 trailers and 75 power units has access to over 600 communities in B.C. Moreover, a half-century of handling dry, fresh and frozen products has enabled the family-owned company to literally write the book on perishable commodities transportation. (It's titled 'Best Practices for Handling Perishable Freight' and is crucial to daily operations.)

Much of Clark Freightways' growth is because President Marcus Clark constantly reinvests in his company — a trait he inherited from his father, Jim. But so too do the owners of other trucking firms, and the results aren't as spectacu-

lar. So what is the recipe for success?

Vice-president and General Manager Greg Rogge offers the answer. "Our grocery customers, both large and small, who account for up to 65 per cent of our business, need reliability of service, quality control and timely communication, and we're always looking for ways to improve in those areas," he says. "For example, we've recently augmented our Web services with customer shipment tracking and tracing, document and image retrieval — and we'll soon add real-time delivery notification via email if requested. We're always listening to our customers' needs and developing solutions."

Such innovations have prompted an unusual degree of customer loyalty. Case in point — Burnaby, B.C.-based Horizon Distributors, a leading distributor of

organic and natural products to independent retailers and mass market grocery chains. "Clark has been providing us with excellent logistics solutions for nearly 20 years now," says Horizon Vice-President and General Manager Terri

Newell. "The Clark team fulfils every promise they make, and this is vital because they're not only a delivery company but also an ambassador of Horizon: Their consistent performance makes us look good."

Another customer is Arla Foods Inc., a major supplier of specialty cheese. Clark Freightways started the relationship by delivering to Arla's retailers in the Okanagan and on Vancouver Island, while Arla's fleet delivered to Lower Mainland retailers. But last August, Arla decided to hand over Lower Mainland delivery responsibilities to Clark Freightways. "We now enjoy a full and seamless transportation solution, with greater overall delivery efficiency and at a lower cost than what we used to pay," says Arla distribution manag-



After 50 years of service, Clark Freightways finds new ways to self-improve.

er Chad Jones. Rogge adds, "The size of our fleet provides greater flexibility to respond to incremental volumes and increased efficiency enables us to make all deliveries in a more timely manner as opposed to Arla's smaller fleet."

Clark Freightways was originally launched in 1957 as Clark Reefer Lines Ltd. and catered to venues in Williams Lake, Quesnel and the Okanagan. In late 1959 Jim Clark obtained a license as a public carrier in order to haul frozen foods; he then began operating as Clark Transport and gained a reputation for providing fast, efficient service at a fair price. In 1962 he incorporated as Clark Reefer Lines Ltd. and operated out of his first real terminal in Burnaby, hauling any foods requiring temperature control.

By the time Jim Clark, passed away in 1997, the general infrastructure and scope of operations that define his company today were well-established.

Clark Freightways is able to reach over 600 B.C. communities with predominately next-day delivery thanks to distribution facilities that are either company-owned or collaborative ventures with regional partners. "There are many national and

regional carriers, but they don't necessarily serve small or mid-size communities, or have the expertise and infrastructure to handle LTL perishable commodities," says Marcus Clark. "We do."

This is of key importance to companies like organic food distributor UNFI Canada, which has relied on Clark Freightways for over 25 years. "It's rare to find someone who can deliver dry, fresh and frozen anywhere in the

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province without any issues, and it's crucial to our retailers because they need the freedom to purchase from these three categories in order to make the hauling cost-effective," says UNFI Canada Vice-President Don O'Carroll. "Clark handles at least a quarter of our 200-odd daily shipments, and their overnight or next-day delivery applies to remote destinations like Prince George."

Chad Jones singles out Clark Freightways' new proprietary Web Bill of Lading system as "a huge competitive advantage." The system enables clients to easily create freight bills in seconds, through the use of pre-populated fields and easy drop-down menus. It also allows customers to easily create, store and utilize waybill templates for recurring orders, thus further saving time and money.

This combined with the real-time delivery notification (accomplished within minutes of when a driver electronically keys in each shipment with his handheld computer) "has greatly freed up the resources of my staff, plus it will nip potential problems in the

bud instead of me discovering delivery discrepancies 24 hours after they've occurred," says Jones.

Both Jones and O'Carroll express their enthusiasm for yet another Clark Freightways reinvestment — its new cross-dock headquarters in Coquitlam, which includes dry, cooler and freezer facilities, on-site maintenance and certified inspection capabilities. "It's a

management all the way to the warehouse guys, they take great pride in being professionals."

That professionalism is nurtured on an individual basis by comprehensive orientation and training, proactive identification and elimination of work hazards, as well as emergency preparedness planning. Adherence to the 'Best Practices for Handling Perishable Freight' manual is indispensable to daily operations since HACCP programs vary from shipper to shipper: Standards must be extremely high to ensure customer satisfaction. (Every employee receives training in temperature control, and refrigeration equipment principles.)

Clark Freightways also scrupulously manages its carbon footprint, and many of the green initiatives it has implemented over the years have been of practical benefit to customers. "We recently equipped our fleet with low resistance tires and aerodynamic trailer skirts, which reduce drag and therefore fuel consumption," explains Richard Saumier, the company's director of operations. The savings in fuel costs are passed on to customers by way of lower fuel surcharges.

The future for the trucking industry is challenging, and escalating costs may well result in drastically downsized fleets for some companies and consolidation for others. At Clark Freightways,

however, the trajectory of growth and self-improvement remains rock-solid. "Given the degree to which our Dedicated Transportation Service frees up our customers' time and resources and helps them manage future cost increases, our intention is to grow that service even further — as well as expand in the food market segment overall," says Rogge. "Whatever our customers need, we're in a good position to service those requirements."

To which Chad Jones adds by way of conclusion, "The team at Clark Freightways have worked extremely hard to achieve what they've got now, and the way they're going they'll soon be leaving more of the competition in the dust. I can't say enough good things about Clark Freightways."



major element that enhances Clark's organization and control over delivery routes," says the latter.

Clark and Rogge enjoy discussing systems and operations, but they aren't prone to philosophical introspection. Ask them why they continue to self-improve rather than resting on their laurels, and Rogge will invariably reply that "becoming more efficient isn't an option, it's mandatory — that is, if you want to survive."

However, Newell says she has witnessed a deeper underlying motivation for the company's initiatives. "The management team, along with everyone else at Clark, are genuinely happy when they can help a business thrive," she says. Jones agrees: "From senior

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