

The dos and don'ts of network discipline



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Introduction

Network discipline helps create a strong foundation for long-term efficiency and profitability in your trucking operations. No matter the fluctuating conditions of the market or how intense the competition gets, you'll need to focus on the strategic management of your freight network. Carriers that concentrate on their core strengths, take advantage of the insights they garner from data, and foster more effective communication throughout their teams will be better equipped to seize opportunities and navigate challenges as they come.

Today, we'll outline the most important dos and don'ts of maintaining effective network discipline with supporting ideas from industry thought leaders. Our goal is to help you optimize your operations and achieve sustained success through expert-level network discipline.

With insights from trucking leaders:



Cole Stevens

Chief Strategy Officer



[DRIVER FOCUSED. PEOPLE DRIVEN.]



Chris Henry

Chief Operating Officer



Transport Advisors



Lars Ward

VP of Sales and Strategic Partnerships





Do:

Focus on geographic density

The wisest logistics minds concentrate their operations within established lanes and specific geographic areas to enhance their efficiency across the board. When you maintain geographic density, you can better optimize route planning, reduce empty miles, and improve the reliability of your services.

Chris Henry put it succinctly: **“Density drives efficiency, efficiency drives the velocity, and velocity will ultimately drive profitability. And that’s a universal truth that applies to pretty much any business. But in trucking, especially in this market, it’s one that should be imprinted on your company’s walls and repeated.”**

Your team should work to embrace this principle to allow your business to operate more smoothly and profitably within the market.





Don't:

Overextend into unfamiliar regions



If you expand into new geographic areas without careful forethought, you put your business at risk of stretching resources too thin and encountering unforeseen obstacles and challenges. You'll need to balance the potential profitability of new markets along with their potential risks. Stick to the core areas where you've already established your operations and have strong local knowledge to maintain efficiency and control.

Any time you decide to explore a new region, limit your expansion to under 5 percent of your network to test the waters without putting your existing operations into jeopardy. You should also ensure your shipper partners understand your goals, as Cole Stevens explained: **"It's timing of having those conversations, but then it's the willingness with your shipper partners to see that, I've got a creative solution for you and that I can actually do it."**

Don't overextend yourself – it can lead to costly mistakes when navigating unfamiliar permits or obscure local restrictions. The last thing you want is a growth effort backfiring and harming your finances and customer relationships.



Do:

Ensure cross-team communication

Smooth collaboration between your operations, sales, and pricing teams is critical – it's the best way to guarantee unified decision-making and seamless execution. You need to continually foster open communication if you want to ensure your departments are aligned with your company objectives and can respond quickly to changes in the market.

Lars Ward spoke to the importance of cross-team communication: **“Think about the nature of growth and trucking in general. Change is so inherent to our business because you don’t sell it and then forget it. When you win it is when you start it. And then putting all the pieces together and having that figure out some sort of harmony that actually makes sense, delivers to the customer what they expected and is profitable to the business is where all the hard work is.”**





Don't:

Neglect pricing strategy



Try to keep your pricing and sales functions separate by implementing a centralized pricing model. That way, you can have a dedicated individual or team set up to evaluate risks, assess probabilities, and incorporate sales inputs to create rates that make sense for your business.

Chris Henry explained: **“A key part of that puzzle is a centralized pricing model. So you can’t, in our opinion, have sales and pricing intermingled.”**

If you centralize your pricing, your company can respond accurately and swiftly to market dynamics in an agile and competitive manner.

But if you fail to align pricing with reality, it can lead to costly mistakes. Cole Stevens laid out his thoughts on the risks: **“You gotta be lockstep between your sales and your pricing and your operations team with not overextending. If I’ve never done anything to the state of Washington, you gotta go through more times than not the state of Oregon. So if your safety team doesn’t know that you need those permits, you can find yourself in a world of hurt if you didn’t price it correctly.”**



Do:

Diversify strategically

It always feels great to expand your customer base and freight offerings, but you'll need to ensure you can diversify without overextending your core strengths. With strategic diversification, you can prevent overreliance on a single customer that might wield too much influence over your business.

As Cole Stevens put it: **"I'm all for strategic, smart diversification so that we're not overextended with one customer to where they have full buying power over our fleet. But also too, you can over diversify and really ruin a relationship with another small customer or another potential customer that could have grown to be a large customer because you're trying to over diversify."**

If you diversify intelligently, you can maintain sturdy relationships with your existing clients while opening pathways to new opportunities. This can help ensure sustainable growth without compromising your service quality.





Don't:

Ignore data and analytics



There's no need to severely limit your ability to make informed decisions about lane profitability and network adjustments – yet that's exactly what companies do when they overlook the importance of data and analytics.

Don't do that. Instead, leverage key performance indicators (KPIs) and data analysis to identify trends, optimize your routes, and enhance your operational efficiency. And whatever you do, avoid relying on outdated information. **“Doubling down on quality control on data is key...”** said Chris Henry. **“Bad data in, bad data out. Focus on using time-stamped data for accurate optimization.”**

As long as you ensure the accuracy and timeliness of your data, you can empower your team to make those choices that drive profitability and keep you competitive.



Do:

Emphasize service over price

If you deliver exceptional, consistently high-quality service, it's a better differentiator than offering bottom-dollar prices. Provide excellent service to build trust and grow those long-term relationships with shippers who value your reliability and quality.

According to the [2024 Inbound Logistics Perspectives 3PL Market Research Report](#), this continues to be a great way to achieve sustainable success: **“While keeping a close eye on costs, shippers still value good service above price. In this year’s survey, 74 percent of shippers indicate that service is the more important factor of the two. That’s a healthy number, but it’s lower than in 2023, when 81 percent of shippers chose service over price.”**

Put an emphasis on the quality of your service offerings if you want to position your company as a trusted partner. That can lead to repeat business and a better reputation – even as cost pressures persist.



Don't: Underestimate the power of brokerage



It can be tough to meet customer demands and balance your network without the occasional help of a middle-man. That's why companies incorporate non-asset brokerage models into their operations – it significantly enhances their abilities without the need for additional assets.

If you take advantage of brokerage services, you can offer more flexible solutions and optimize your capacity utilization. Chris Henry shared his thoughts on this system: **“If you want to weather the storm and all these roller coasters, you need to have a high performing non-asset business to leverage the good stuff that you’re doing on the asset side.”**

Even if you've never worked this way in the past, there's no reason to leave the option off the table. Embracing a non-asset brokerage can complement your existing operations and help your company thrive in the industry more effectively.



Conclusion

When your trucking business maintains a disciplined network, you can achieve lasting efficiency and profitability. It requires strategic planning, data utilization, streamlined communication throughout your teams, and a strong emphasis on providing quality services.

Success in this industry ultimately requires a balanced approach. You'll need to play to your core strengths while staying vigilant and adaptable to market changes as they come. Then, you'll be in a better position to build better customer relationships, respond effectively to challenges, and optimize your freight network for growth.



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your network could do?

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