Software Could Shift Load for Truckers

LOGISTICS: Smaller Carriers Get More Access To Shippers

■ By Brad Graves

LaneAxis makes software for companies that ship by truck. The product works on both mobile phones, shown, and desktops. Screen shots courtesy of LaneAxis LaneAxis makes software for companies that ship by truck. The product works on both mobile phones, shown, and desktops. Screen shots courtesy of LaneAxis San Diego — It's a long road with nothing but prairie between Ogallala and North Platte, Neb.

What San Diegan Rick Burnett wants to offer, even on this lonely stretch of Interstate 80, is visibility.

He wants a shipper to know where the load is, even if the shipper is smaller than a multinational company, and even if that shipper has put the load in the care of a mom-and-pop trucking firm with limited resources.

Burnett is founder and CEO of a business called LaneAxis Inc., which offers cloud-based freight management software. Burnett's technology company occupies the middle ground between businesses with merchandise to ship and small trucking companies that want a chance to haul that merchandise.

Long the territory of logistics brokers and similar professionals, LaneAxis wants to match up shippers and truckers, and give shippers some extra information.

"One-hundred percent visibility" is what Burnett calls it.

Geo-Fencing Feature

The LaneAxis software can work on a desktop or a mobile device.

It can help truckers and shippers manage required documents.

A shipper concerned about the progress of a load no longer has to have his driver call in his location every 15 minutes. A geo-fencing feature in LaneAxis software, coupled with GPS data, independently verifies that a driver has passed a certain point along the route. A driver might claim he delivered his load at 6 p.m., but it's better to have technology confirm that the driver broke the geo-fence at 5:47, Burnett said.

Company marketing materials include one screen grab showing how LaneAxis software might track the progress of a truck traveling the 849 miles between Fort Madison, Iowa to Aurora, Colo. The software displays an interstate highway map and drops a pin in certain locations (including Ogallala, Neb.) indicating when the truck passed.

LaneAxis plans to charge shippers by the load, saying its fee will be affordable. Carriers will be able to use the software for free.

LaneAxis estimates that trucking is a $700 billion market.

The software could help shippers and drivers with a variety of other issues:

• Timely information can help managers respond to inevitable contingencies. If a driver is running late, Burnett said, the receiving business might decide to send its crew home and instruct the driver to come to the loading dock first thing in the morning.

• Once a trucker delivers a load, his trailer is empty. Burnett said LaneAxis might have a business opportunity filling those otherwise-empty trucks on their way home.

• Drivers must keep logs of their hours, and the government limits the hours that truckers may be on duty. "Most logbooks are paper," Burnett said. LaneAxis software can help drivers log their hours of service, though that is not the company's primary reason for being. Many other vendors are rushing into the hours of service space, Burnett said, as the federal government prepares to make electronic driver logs mandatory by December 2017.

• Shippers might have a good use for all the data that the LaneAxis system can collect. A shipper faced with 1,000 time-sensitive loads to carry might look through its data for vendors who have 95 percent on-time pickups and 95 percent on-time deliveries, and choose accordingly, Burnett said.

Rick Burnett

Big Names in the Business

Big-name, national trucking companies can afford more exotic tracking technology. (Qualcomm Inc., by the way, got into the space early in its history with a product that tracked trucks by satellite.) However, even big-name trucking companies subcontract work to smaller carriers, who can use LaneAxis by leveraging a driver's smartphone, Burnett said.

The appearance of smartphones in the 2010s makes his whole business possible, the CEO added. When he started his project in 2005, he recalled, wireless phones had their limits and there were firewall issues.

Truckers have their choice of a lot of apps these days, said Norita Taylor, a spokeswoman for industry organization OOIDA, the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association. Organization members look for apps to find loads as well as to help with the work of running a small business, Taylor said.

She also sees vendors flocking to the electronic log space with the federal mandate for that technology.

LaneAxis, Inc.

CEO: Rick Burnett

Revenue: Undisclosed

No. of local employees: Eight

Investors: Burnett, friends, family, individual & institutional investors

Headquarters: 4S Ranch

Year founded: 2015

Company Description: LaneAxis offers software that primarily helps businesses that ship by truck, and also helps small trucking firms