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Making Your Miles Count: Choosing a Trucking Company

One of the most interesting sections of research for my second book was the charting of fuel taxes. Over 30% of the 260 pages were dedicated to fuel costs. The specific IFTA fuel costs needed to be explored in detail in order to expose high/low cost jurisdictions (I used June 30th 2012 rates/numbers). What I did was chart the cents per liter fuel taxes for every jurisdiction in North America (see figure 1).

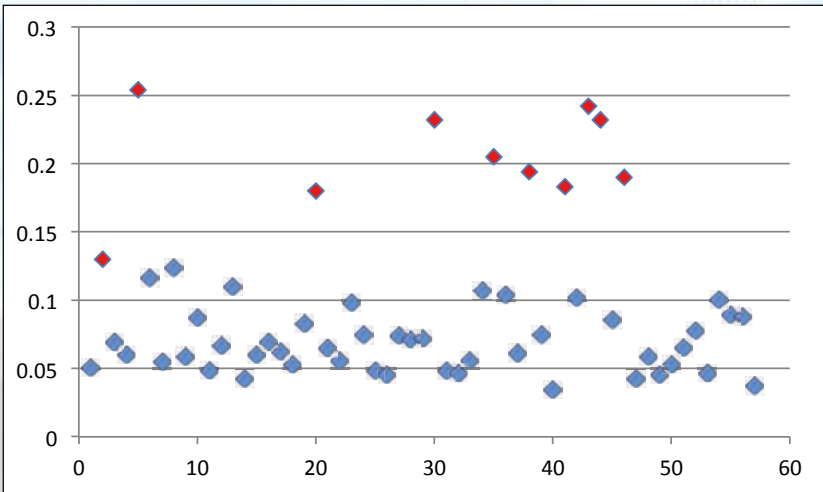


FIGURE 1. Cents per liter

The chart shows two colors: red and blue. Blue are the United States jurisdictions and Red is Canadian. The first observation we can see is that Canadians are grossly over taxed. Canadian's lowest rate (Alberta) is still higher than the United States highest. I'm not exactly sure why we Canadians put up with this type of financial carnage... but we do. Taxes are just one issue that places Canadian trucking at a disadvantage over our US counterparts.

Another major disadvantage is our weather. This of course doesn't change, regardless of who we elect into office. It also must be said that commercial truck manufacturers do not build trucks for the Canadian winter! In all honesty I'm not sure who really could. Even steel becomes brittle at 40 below zero. Driving in Canada can sometimes be life threatening.

Canada deals with its cold the best it can. However, it becomes expensive. Not only is Canada over taxed from fuel taxes, it must contend with winter fuel issues, specifically gelling. The extreme cold weather causes diesel fuel to gell. In order to minimize the risk of gelling, diesel fuel is "winterized" by thinning it down. The problem with thinning it is the excessive loss of power. Most engines drop about a mile per gallon when the thinned fuel starts pumping.

When clients ask where is the best place to fuel (referring to price), I first comment on the extreme difference between fuel consumption rates. Price is not nearly as important as volume purchased. It is one of the areas where some operators save more than anywhere else. I'm referring to parking the truck in heated locations. However, avoiding winter fuel is still similar to playing Russian roulette. It may not be lethal but it can be an expensive gamble.

Knowing your costs and consumption is critical to the long term success of an operator. It's one of the reasons when choosing a trucking company, operators must ask themselves (or

the carrier) if they will be getting the same consumption rate at the new carrier verses their existing one. Consumption rate has many variables: weight, terrain, equipment, temperature and above all driving habits. Will any of these variables change? Fuel taxes may be a fixed cost per mile (being calculated down to the cent before the truck even leaves the yard) but consumption may and will change nearly every trip.

Making Your Miles Count is the most thorough educational series available to Canadian operators. It is dedicated to operator's success and the industry's strength. As the author I'd like to give thanks to Over the Road Magazine for its support of healthy Operators across Canada.

Robert D Scheper operates an accounting and consulting firm in Steinbach, Manitoba. He has a Master's Degree in Business Administration and is the author of the Book Series "Making Your Miles Count" (taxes, taxes, taxes in 2007) and (Choosing a Trucking Company 2015).

You can find him and his books at www.makingyourmilescount.com or 1-877-987-9787. You can also e-mail him at robert@thrconsulting.ca.



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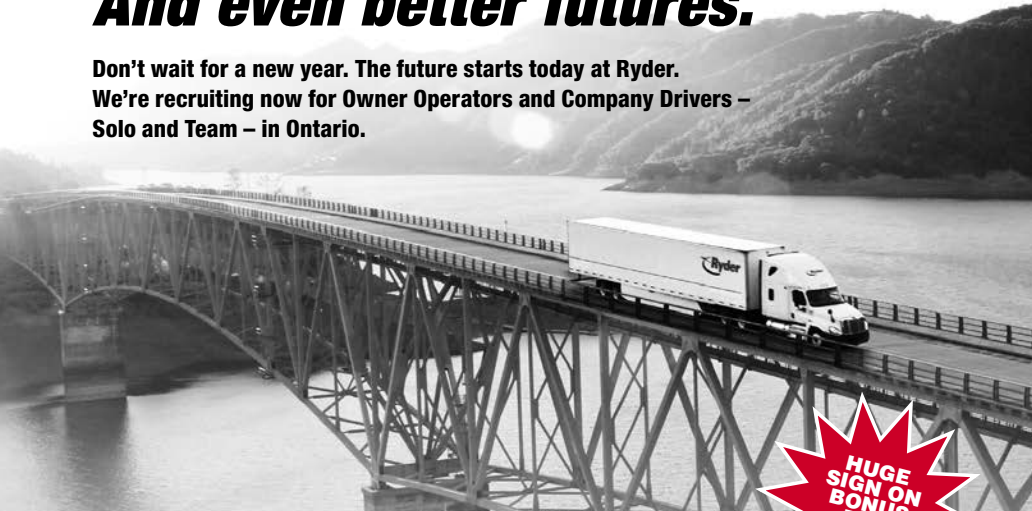
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Ray J. Haight



Strategic Planning

This is the time of year when Strategic Planning begins to enter the planning process for many well-run, competitive organizations. If this is something that your organization is not currently doing, I would suggest that you are missing the boat on the profitability of your company and possibly, working harder than your fellow truckers.

Wikipedia defines Strategic Planning as: *"an organization's process of defining its strategy, or direction, and making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy. Data is gathered from a variety of sources, such as interviews with key executives, review of publicly available documents on the competition or market, primary research (e.g., visiting or observing competitor places of business or comparing prices), industry studies, etc. This may be part of a competitive intelligence program. Inputs are gathered to help support an understanding of the competitive environment and its opportunities and risks."*

By the end of a year, a successfully executed strategic plan will have increased shareholder value. A company is only worth what the market is willing to pay for it at any given time. So why don't all small businesses look at their company in the same light and focus on how it would be measured against the market?

To expand on this thought process, it has been my experience that many small trucking companies do not really understand the

underlying principles of what success looks like through budgeting and strategic planning. During my consulting career it has not been unusual to receive looks of confusion when owners are asked to define what a successful year for their business looks like to them.

In its simplest definition; a successful year would be one where one's company has increased its shareholder value at a pace that achieves the prior years Strategic Plan and corresponding budget. Contrary to popular belief, this may or may not put additional hard cash in the owner's pocket. Success depends on other objectives that were set during Strategic Planning of the prior year. Maybe that strategy included paying down company debt or having less reliance on banking institutions, or maybe the plan included significant expansion. Perhaps, the plan is to diversify revenue streams or increase market penetration.

If every privately-held company in the trucking industry had the discipline, on an annual basis, to have their company valued to the market as if they were going to sell, there would likely be some very shocked folks. What this would do though would be to begin the discipline of an annual company reality check and as a natural off-shoot, set a path to strategic planning and budgeting.

All of this brings me to the new tool that is available to the industry called inGauge; this tool is invaluable to the process and as one of

the contributing architects, I humbly suggest it has the potential to change the industry. My partners and I have optimism of its success. Why? Because it is simply 'that good of a product.' We began to build this product by sitting down and doing a "what if" exercise and then we built it. So here are the 'what ifs':

What if we could build a benchmarking tool that would tell trucking companies how they are performing, not only to their own historical data, but also to their specific market competition. So a 100-truckload van fleet would compare to another 100-truck truckload van fleet in their geographic area in over 50 areas of operations KPI's (Key Performance Indicators) including the biggies: fuel cost, insurance cost, equipment cost, driver expenses, maintenance, EBIDA etc.

Pretty good eh!

But, what if we could also show companies not only where they are underperforming but also the dollar opportunity that is available to them in any of the areas they are benchmarking themselves to? If we could do that, it would allow the company to prioritize where their focus needs to be to have the greatest impact to their company's results.

Neat stuff but, what if, in addition to giving them a monthly scorecard showing where improvement to market is needed, we also provided a goal setting and goal tracking feature that could be pushed out to the frontline people in the company? This would require an administrator within the company to send the specific data to those folks who work in that area and not the entire data set. Now were helping folks manage, right to the front line employees.

That's great but, what if we also provided a goal setting feature? One that the administrator

could configure with action items along with due dates and also have access to what other companies action items were, that relate to the same goals. We also could identify when actions item get off track or behind schedule in a visual way. So all that's left for a company is to close the loop. We have identified shortfalls in performance, we have quantified the financial impact of addressing the shortfalls and we have provided an accountability, goal-tracking tool.

But, what if we close the loop with an information resource for each of the 50 plus items that we are benchmarking; a depository of documents, videos, pdfs etc. that could be rated as to relevance and popularity on any given subject?

So fast forward from idea stage to our September 2015 release date and we now have a service in the marketplace that has all the elements described above and more. We are currently at over 100 company profiles; both publicly traded and privately held companies and we are growing daily.

If you're not using Strategic Planning, I strongly urge you to get at it. If you are, inGauge has the platform for your company to work off that will ensure you are focusing on those areas of your company that will yield the greatest results.

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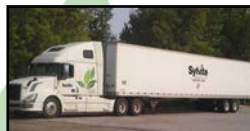
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New Year's Resolutions

If your goal is to drop a few pounds in the coming year, you are not alone. The top New Year's resolution last December was to lose weight. The second most common resolution was to "get organized," followed by spending less or saving more. The fourth top New Year's resolution was to "enjoy life to the fullest," and the fifth most common goal was to stay fit and healthy.

More than half of us make a promise to change something as the calendar turns from one year to the next. How many of us actually succeed? The odds are good that you keep your promise through the first week in January, but less than half of us keep our resolutions for six months. According to StatisticBrain.com, only eight percent of us achieve success in maintaining that New Year's objective.

However, you are more likely to attain your goal if you go to the effort to make the resolution in the first place.

What is the best way to make a New Year's resolution? According to eHow.com, make sure your goal is achievable. None of us can stop global warming or bring world peace, so make sure you are considering something that is within your reach for the next twelve months, or longer.

Break your goal into specific terms and outline small steps in how you'll make changes in your life. Instead of trying to lose fifty pounds

in 2016, try losing five pounds per month and you'll meet your goal with a few pounds to spare. Write down the goal and the steps you will take to get there, like exercise three times per week and cut down on desserts.

The first New Year's resolutions were intended to be positive changes for the coming year. The Romans used the new calendar to remind themselves to be good to others, but the celebration became one of prayers and fasting after adopting Christianity as its official religion in the fourth century.

The Puritans kept the tradition of self-reflection going in the 18th century as they instructed their children to reflect on the past year and contemplate the New Year with commitments to become better neighbors and avoid sinful activities.

The Statisticbrain.com categorized our resolutions and report the top promises are related to self-improvement or education goals. Second resolution types are about weight goals, followed closely by money-related commitments and relationship-related resolutions.

The Women in Trucking Facebook pages includes over 9,000 members who were asked to share their New Year's resolutions. While this is an unscientific sample, it is driver focused and the responses reflected this group of professionals.

Deb promised to keep up with paperwork and not procrastinate. She also resolved to listen more and speak less. Ingrid's comment was to start asking for help and stop taking on "more than I can do." Laura's promise was to start putting her own needs first. Lisa agreed with this and stated that she would "take care of my needs and wants instead of putting me last." Lisa also resolved to get in shape and lose some weight. Tanya's resolution was to "realize the need for patience among new drivers [who are] doing wrong maneuvers."

If you are in your twenties, your odds of attaining your New Year's goal are higher. StatisticBrain.com found that 39 percent of people in their twenties achieved their resolutions compared to only fourteen percent of those over fifty.

According to historian Bill Petro (billpetro.com), a young Theologian named Jonathan Edwards created a list of seventy resolutions he promised to review on a weekly basis. A few notable ones include:

Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.

Resolved, never to do anything out of revenge.

Resolved, never to speak evil of any, except I have some particular good call for it.

Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.

We could all use some positive changes in our lives and a new year is the perfect time to look forward and leave our old bad habits behind. Whether your resolution is to lose weight, get healthy, work on your relationships, take a class, or to "live with all your might," it's a great time to work on self-improvements.

Happy New Year from all of us at the Women In Trucking Association.

Ellen Voie

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