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Terence A. Brown

Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg

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BOOK REVIEW:

TRUCKING IN THE AGE OF INFORMATION

Dale Belman and Chelsea White, III, Editors
Ashgate Publishing Company, Burlington, VT, 2005

Reviewed by
Terence A. Brown
Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg

This excellent book is intended to provide an introduction to the modern U.S. trucking industry as well as a source of in-depth information on some specific topics for more knowledgeable people (see p. xv). The work includes eleven chapters, each written by one or more different authors that are current faculty members in U.S. universities. It is particularly interesting because it covers a wide array of topics involving trucking, written by a variety of researchers.

The book is divided into two sections: Chapters one through five provide an overview of the industry and chapters six through eleven focus on specific topics. Chapter one provides a history of the motor carrier industry broken into three eras: the infant industry prior to 1935, the regulated era of 1935 to 1980, and the deregulated era from 1980 to the present. After reviewing these eras, the author concludes that deregulation has benefited shippers and their customers but trucking labor and many trucking companies have suffered. Of particular interest is data which shows the enormous growth of trucking in terms of total transport revenues—from 23% in 1948 to 81% in 1998.

Chapter 2 provides a profile of truckload carriers, the largest sector of trucking. These firms had significant productivity gains since 1980, but their financial rewards have not kept pace. The carriers now face a number of challenges including a shift to package transport

direct to consumers and leaner inventories—both of which reduce the use of truckload shipments.

Chapter 3 describes less-than-truckload (LTL) carriers and notes that today there are fewer but larger firms in this sector in comparison to 1980. In addition, total sector revenues have not grown greatly from 1980 through 2000. The chapter also includes a description of LTL operations, networks and technology.

Chapter 4 is devoted to package express, a rapidly growing part of trucking. The development of United Parcel Service, Federal Express and DHL is described and the authors note how well these firms have integrated trucking and air transport. Package express has grown along with trends toward global operations, lean inventories, rapid customer response and e-commerce.

Chapter 5 is an overview of logistics service providers also called the third party logistics (3PL) industry. Survey results from 3PL customers identify success factors, concerns, services offered and common types of services outsourced. Chapter 6 describes state trucking deregulation and shows that it was followed by a small decline in real truck rates.

Technology in trucking is the focus of Chapter 7, which describes six technologies: mobile communications, decision support systems, automatic vehicle identification, electronic data

interchange (EDI), bar coding, and imaging systems. Survey results indicate mobile communications is most commonly used (probably due to low cost), followed by EDI, which is often installed in response to customer demands.

A particularly important topic—truck drivers—is addressed in Chapter 8. Results of two surveys are reviewed and four conclusions are suggested:

1. Deregulation hurt driver earnings.
2. There is no evidence of driver shortage, but high turnover makes it seem so.
3. Drivers are not underpaid—they earn somewhat more than others with comparable skills.
4. Owner-operators are an important group of drivers and tend to be older, more experienced, and have more financial assets than the typical driver.

Chapter 9 analyzes five case studies and concludes that the Toyota-Transfreight example is the only true lean learning system studied. Toyota views the people in its production system as the backbone of the organization while other firms focus on technology and see humans as necessary evils.

Chapter 10 concerns truck safety and describes new information technologies that may offer help

in improving truck safety in the future. The authors note that "...there are abundant sources of trucking related information but they are not linked to form a composite overview of trucking health and safety" (p. 263). In addition, the authors conclude that there is little known about the effects of training on safety and driver performance.

Chapter 11 reviews a variety of industry developments, including earnings declines, greater regulation and scrutiny of drivers, that have led to poorer working conditions in the industry. The author (an employee of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters) concludes that the only way to improve the lot of drivers is for them to join a union.

This book makes an excellent contribution to the literature on the U.S. trucking industry. It should serve as a useful reference for students, practitioners and researchers. In addition, it could also be used as a supplemental source for courses on transportation. In fact, it might be the primary text for a seminar on the industry. Of course, all books can be improved. A useful addition would be a chapter on the role of truck brokers in the industry. In any case, this book is an excellent source of timely information and should be read by everyone with an interest in trucking.