

# **RUAN**

DEDICATION THAT MOVES YOUR BUSINESS

## **MAINTAINING INTEGRITY: FINDING THE RIGHT COLD CHAIN 3PL PARTNER**

Making a logistics outsourcing decision is difficult enough. And if your products are temperature-sensitive and require specific handling, you have many additional factors to consider. How will I know that my products haven't been exposed to temperature extremes during transport? Can I trust my logistics provider to handle the products with care? What are my carrier's maintenance practices?

One thing remains constant in all negotiations: you must trust that your carrier uses the best practices. In the case of frozen and refrigerated products, your reputation, your company's reputation, and your company's brands, depend upon quality handling by many parties, including your transportation provider.

Three issues are of utmost importance to cold chain integrity: constant temperature at all times; safe and careful product handling to maintain appearance and packaging integrity; and a high level of vehicle and system maintenance.

### **Temperature monitoring and reporting**

Many frozen foods require a constant temperature of zero degrees Fahrenheit, and others, like ice cream, require even colder environments. Products from other industries, like pharmaceuticals, require different temperature environments. As a logistics manager for one of these products, your chief concern is making sure that the proper environment is maintained at every point in the product's handling and transit.

Several options are available for monitoring and reporting temperature changes. Logging and non-logging temperature recorders are available. Manual temperature monitoring devices are another option. Because one temperature monitoring and recording method may not be the best option for all of your products, Ruan uses a combination of temperature monitoring and logging devices.

### **Safe product handling**

Even with constant and perfect temperature monitoring, a product can fail when it reaches the end customer if it isn't handled properly at every step of the cold chain. Safe handling is everyone's responsibility.

For many 3PL providers, consistent handling is very difficult to reliably monitor and maintain because of high driver turnover. However, Ruan consistently achieves high levels of employee retention and training. Because we offer our employees outstanding compensation and benefit packages, we attract some of the best drivers, customer service representatives, and technicians in the country. They provide a level of service for all of our customers that is virtually unparalleled.

This low turnover rate creates consistencies for our customers and a level of comfort. However, it is necessary to balance dependable safe handling with cost efficiencies. Because we have long-term customers, we've learned over time how to efficiently deliver a high-quality product while achieving lower costs. For example, Ruan best practices tell us it is necessary to pre-cool a trailer prior to loading it. Many providers might start the refrigeration unit with the door open and hope to achieve the appropriate temperature. The only result of this method is to burn expensive fuel without cooling the trailers. Ruan drivers pre-cool to the needed temperature, turn off the unit, and then load. Though a small step, it reduces our customers' costs. It is something we've learned through our many years of experience.

We also maximize our delivery schedules to gain best efficiencies. Regular meetings with the customer service team allow us to continually identify better ways to route loads to become more efficient with time and resources.

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## **Maintenance and cleanliness matter**

Though it seems like a basic premise, your 3PL provider needs to have high standards for maintenance and cleanliness. Trucks won't run on poor or inconsistent maintenance schedules. If your provider can't or won't share their maintenance schedules and practices, you should look elsewhere. Vehicle maintenance is a major part of the equation for achieving solid cold chain integrity.

Cleanliness also is important. You take care to produce a great product. You've selected a solid 3PL partner. Your hard work is undone if your products arrive in dirty, torn, dented, or broken packaging. Conveying a positive image on the outside is just as important to the life of a product and branding, as delivering a quality product inside the package.

Proper cleaning of trailers also can affect consistent temperature integrity. When trailers are not cleaned thoroughly, return vents can become clogged. When this happens, the reefer unit can ice up and cooling is diminished or prevented.

## **FIND A PARTNER**

Three basic issues emerge when evaluating a cold chain 3PL partner: temperature monitoring and recording; safe and careful product handling; and maintenance and cleanliness. Because these issues are of utmost importance, you must find the right supplier to meet your needs.

Regardless of the issues in your 3PL outsourcing decision, you and your provider must work together to determine appropriate guidelines and set goals to meet them. Your 3PL provider is your partner and should be dedicated to constantly meeting your needs. Not all frozen or refrigerated products are the same, so your 3PL partner shouldn't try to service all of them in the same way. A cookie cutter solution does not translate into a strong partnership.

Open a dialogue with potential providers before you choose one. They should be willing to invest the time to get to know you and to understand your needs, then they should design a service that meets your needs.