Averitt Tests It All in Alt-Fuel Pilot Program

Going Beyond the Oil Change for Best Fleet Performance

Averitt Forms Specialized LTL Service

Climate Control: What to Expect with Proposed FDA Food Transport Rules
Averitt Express has recently launched an industry first: self-powered climate controlled less-than-truckload (LTL) units that can keep freight either cold or hot. While refrigerated trailers have long been an option for truckload shipments, this is the first option available to mix both temperature controlled and dry good shipments on the same trailer using this type of shipping unit.

According to Phil Pierce, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Averitt, which is headquartered in Cookeville, Tenn., the most common option that currently exists for climate controlled LTL transportation is an exclusive trucking model.
service. While Averitt’s climate controlled LTL service is considered a premium option, it is less costly than the exclusive truck mode. Plus, Averitt’s model goes beyond refrigeration, allowing for a range of climate controlled options.

Pierce says that Averitt had been in conversations about starting a temperature controlled LTL service since the early ’90s, but until recently, every product researched presented some sort of weakness. The company was already providing temperature controlled truckload services, along with warehousing, international, intermodal and its well-known dry goods LTL services. However, Averitt wanted to extend its climate controlled offering beyond truckload into the LTL market. The market need for such a service was clear.

After Averitt discovered Climate Controlled Containers Inc. through a local media report, Pierce and a few other decision makers traveled to Port Arthur, Texas, home of the manufacturers of the climate controlled units, to find out more about the systems. Pierce notes, “We didn’t know them and they didn’t know us, but what came out of those initial conversations was that we could maybe revolutionize the market in certain verticals.”

How It Works
Using the units from Climate Controlled Containers to transport LTL shipments is a completely different model than what is currently available in the marketplace. Today’s most common approach is for providers to pack LTL shipments in dry ice to cool the units. Unfortunately, this limits what providers can transport and has other operational, economic and environmental drawbacks.

Instead, Averitt’s self-powered units are battery operated, which is quite the departure from using dry ice. Chuck Odom, vice president of sales for global development at Averitt, explains, “Every hour a customer uses the dry ice unit, it burns about three-and-a-half pounds of dry ice. So if you have a 100-hour journey, you need 350 pounds of dry ice. Ours burns none.”

After charging the battery for about eight hours, the units can run for up to 150 hours. This helps guarantee a set temperature for customers from departure to arrival. And not only do these units cool cargo, they can also warm up or simply keep cargo at room temperature despite the frigid cold or unrelenting heat outside. This is good news, in particular, for companies transporting goods such as pharmaceuticals, chemicals, medical supplies and technology, which often need to remain at a neutral temperature. The units can also handle hazardous materials.

These containers can range anywhere from -10 to 140 degrees Celsius and can be monitored, tracked, and adjusted by customers per their freight needs.
AVERITT CLIMATE-CONTROLLED UNITS

- Size: 40”x48”x60”
- Payload: up to 2,000 lbs.
- Temp. Range: -10 to 140° Celsius
- Battery Life: 150 hours

AVERITT EXPRESS OPERATIONS

- Number of Service Centers: 85
- Tractors: 4,000
- Trailers: 12,000
- Drivers: 4,000

Due to the sensitive cargo and the necessary security, Averitt’s operations team treats each temperature controlled unit with special care.

A Secure Service

Averitt is treating each customer who presents a need for climate controlled freight transportation with extra care. Pierce explains that this service is executed more like an expedited service, complete with standard operating procedures for its operations team. Because this cargo is often of high value and requires tight security, Averitt can put on additional security to each unit upon request. “If you put 1,000 iPads in the unit, you’re going to get 1,000 out,” Odom says.

The customer is directly involved in each aspect of the freight transit with these containers. Customers can even require that the units are cleaned with specific products, for example. Clients can also set and control the temperature remotely, and monitor it along with the humidity, the outside temperature, how fast the truck is going and where it is, and that the truck and the freight are both in compliance at all times.

Because of the customized security, staying compliant with a temperature controlled unit varies case by case. However, Pierce says that Averitt has a team working 24 hours a day, seven days a week so that if a shipment goes out of compliance, the group can actively recover it during the journey.

Brown explains that Averitt’s operational technology proves helpful for the customer. If something were to change with the shipper’s requirements for the freight, Averitt’s operations leadership can instantly alert the driver using on-board Qualcomm computers available in every truck to prevent any disruptions to the service. “We have great infrastructure to communicate with the driver about any necessary adjustments, should the need arise,” he says.

Even the maintenance for these units gets the red carpet service. The maintenance is performed in-house at shops throughout Averitt’s distribution network.

These technicians already handle the maintenance for Averitt’s...
tractor and trailer fleet, so it made sense that they would also handle the necessary maintenance for the climate controlled units.

**Best Practices**

With the launch of any new product, companies must establish standard operating procedures, and Averitt has been working hard to create these for its operational leadership. Every new customer request or requirement gives Averitt another item to add to its operational protocols so it can accommodate every type of cargo.

Additionally, along with training across other company services, Brown explains that drivers are educated on their role in transporting these units. Just like with dry LTL freight, drivers do not have much involvement with actually handling the units.

“The training we do relates more to security and the process that the driver would need to follow should there be an issue, such as the battery getting low or the temperature changing,” he says. “If that happens, the customer and Averitt’s operations leadership are automatically updated. From there, if necessary, the driver will be notified about next steps.”

Averitt’s ability to provide quality care and information with this service is closely related to its own operational technology. As mentioned, Averitt uses Qualcomm units, which are in every truck along with a GPS system.

Aside from the loading and unloading of the freight, the entire customer service process is centralized. Because of this centralization, the dedicated customer service team is able to remotely monitor and control these units and ensure their safe and timely arrival.

**Expectations vs. Reality**

Pierce says that ever since Averitt began considering the climate controlled service, they have been studying and evaluating their offering, making sure they keep the target customers happy.

The difficult part of rolling out a new product like this, Pierce explains, is convincing customers that they’re going to get a reliable service. He says that this product is not for everyday temperature-controlled frozen foods, but more of a high-end vertical that has to have certification and meet government regulations.

According to Odom, the entire process of developing a strong provider-customer relationship with this service is far more consultative and takes longer to iron out with each customer than other types of traditional services. Rather than just providing a rate for a customer’s freight, he says, Averitt has to go through a validation process with customers in the biotech, pharmaceutical and medical fields to ensure security, satisfaction and compliance.

Pierce says that Averitt has seen an overwhelming customer response from the rollout of the climate controlled service. For example, customers love that the units can be programmed to alert as many people as necessary.

Plus, the company is getting quotes every day from all over the country and North America. Shipping climate controlled products is a niche service. Odom explains that identifying the industries with the most potential is key to the future success of the service.

“We know some of the verticals,” Odom says. “For example, transporting vaccines has huge potential.” With the growth of the healthcare market, he explains, seven of the next 10 vaccines require climate control during transport. And with the beginning of vaccine season, which runs from June to October, Averitt is hoping to bring in a lot of that business.

“We’re confident other industries will identify themselves, raise their hand and say ‘We love this,’” Odom says.

The company is also working to educate its sales team about this new service. Odom says it’s a continuous training process for everyone in the company.

**Pride in Service**

Averitt has been moving forward with a number of other advancements as well. The company has rolled out the industry’s first 100% mobile-friendly website, and will soon launch e-notifications to automatically alert customers to changes in the delivery status of a shipment.

The company has also received the LTL Regional Carrier of the Year Award from Walmart for the third year in a row—a testament to the quality of service Averitt provides.