

Tracking toll tabs for truckers

An Albany company exploits a transportation niche it carved for growth and profit

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ALBANY — A small Albany company has found a profitable niche: tracking trucks and the tolls they pay.

Bestpass, as it's called, was spun off into a separate wholly-owned subsidiary of the New York State Motor Truck Association in 2003, two years after it was launched to help the association's member trucking companies.

CEO John Andrews says the company has grown steadily since then. It now employs 15 people, up from 3 three years ago.

Bestpass offers a number of transponder services, negotiating fleet toll discounts in states that offer them — New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland — as well as weigh station bypass services, partnering with another service, PrePass, offered by HELP Inc.

The Bestpass transponders are intended to save trucking companies time and money while tracking individual vehicles' toll charges.

"When you're a fleet, there are certain value discounts you can get from different authorities," Andrews said. "We put all these discounts under one umbrella."

Even in states that don't offer toll discounts, the transponder provides information to the trucking company on toll payments. Companies get just one bill.

Bestpass also handles oversize and overweight permits, Andrews said.

Among the company's 1,800 clients are FedEx Freight, CR England, A. Duie Pyle, Prime Inc., and US Express. Still, there's room for growth. Some of the nation's largest trucking businesses, such as Schneider and J.B. Hunt, aren't yet in the fold, Andrews said.

Meanwhile, the company is talking with operators of toll bridges into Canada about signing on, and it's looking at increasing its footprint beyond the 13 states it serves in the East and Midwest to Texas, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Kansas, Florida and Colorado.

It manages the accounts for 78,000 vehicles, a number that's more than doubled from the 31,000 it managed in 2009.

"We're averaging \$15 million in tolls every month," he said. "That's mostly pass-through" to the various toll collection agencies.

The company produced \$287,000 in income for the New York State Truck Association in 2010, according to federal filings.

And with estimated savings of 5 to 40 percent for its customers, its strong growth is expected to continue.

Asked whether it had competitors, Andrews answered, "Not that I'm aware of," adding, "It's such a unique niche."

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