My Benesch My Team Campaign – ODW Logistics, Inc.

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"We have a shared value set with Benesch. The firm understands our industry and the delicate balance required to preserve our key customer and supplier relationships and protect our business."

John Ness, President & CEO
ODW Logistics, Inc.

ODW Logistics, Inc. is a full-service third-party logistics (3PL) provider with the technology, infrastructure and personalized service to support businesses in a wide range of industries. ODW Logistics, Inc. encompasses ODW Warehousing Group, Dist-Trans, Co., and ODW Logistics and Transportation Services (LTS). Together, these three units provide a seamless supply chain experience for customers and a single-source solution for all of their warehouse and transportation needs. With more than 1,000 employees and over 4 million square feet of warehouse space, ODW Logistics' supply chain solutions are outstanding in the 3PL industry.

Below is a testimonial from John Ness, President & CEO of ODW Logistics, Inc.

Tell me about ODW Logistics.

We are an integrated logistics company offering third-party logistics and supply chain services to a variety of industries. This includes warehousing and transportation, both asset-based and non-asset-based transportation, which means we own trucks and we also hire other carriers to deliver our customers' goods to the places they need to go. We focus on providing an exceptional customer experience and have a very high client satisfaction rate. Being privately held allows us to be very flexible and responsive-we bend over backwards to take care of our customers.

I see that the company has grown a lot.

We've grown in part through acquisition, but we've also had a lot of organic growth. We've launched new businesses and created new companies over the last decade or so that have really expanded our services offering as well as our geographic footprint. One of the expansions was an acquisition we did in 2007 that was an important element of our growth.

Did your acquisition allow you to grow in different areas?

The acquisition was predominantly geographic expansion. We bought a company based in Milwaukee, which also had operations in Chicago and Los Angeles. Those operations and markets are still important to us and are growing and doing well. We also started from scratch a freight management company in 2009 called ODW LTS, which through organic growth only has grown 55% YOY on top-line revenue. We're finding that our customers really enjoy the technology we provide as well as that exceptional customer experience.

How did you come to work with Benesch?

I've known Marc Blubaugh, who is my primary contact at Benesch, for the better part of a decade. Marc is fully invested in the transportation and supply chain industry and participates in more conferences, seminars and trade shows than anybody I know in our industry. In my engagement in industry events over the years, we crossed paths-both in the U.S. and in more exotic locales. It was not long after we started our new transportation company, ODW LTS, that we hired Marc to represent us. So we've been working with Benesch since June 2010. Benesch focuses on two primary things for us: our transportation legal work, which could include anything from claims management to contract review to advisory work on insurance and insurance claim mitigation, and also some general litigation for us as well.

What do you like about working with Marc and Benesch in general?

First of all, there are a lot of things I like about Marc. He's incredibly knowledgeable; I believe he's absolutely one of the best transportation lawyers in America. He's president of the Transportation Lawyers Association (TLA), and is active in and made so many different presentations to industry groups and trade associations over the years. He's extremely knowledgeable about transportation law and keeps our industry as well as our company up to speed on important and evolving changes in the law and regulations. We also have a shared value set with Benesch. They understand our business and the delicate balance we get into with our key customers and suppliers/partners/vendors. Part of navigating a good contract, or even litigation or a claim, is to fight hard for the right outcome on a specific matter but still preserve the relationship, which is important to us as a company. Marc and Benesch do that very well.

That seems to be the nature of your business. You might have a dispute on a particular transaction, but you still want to work with that company in the future.

Our business is about transactions. Day in and day out, a customer tenders freight that needs to get from Point A to Point B and most of the time everything goes well. However, if there's an incident along the way, whether it's our fault or not, we must deal with that incident and be prepared to continue to take the next truckload that's offered. Sometimes this results in a dispute. We need to protect ourselves and at the same time preserve the relationship. Benesch understands that.

Tell me about challenges in the industry.

We're an outsourced logistics company, meaning companies hire us to do work they don't want to do anymore or choose not to do. One of the big trends that's happened is that companies aren't just outsourcing the actual work that needs to be done, they're outsourcing more of their risk. So it becomes a very important legal and risk mitigation issue when we're considering new customer contracts to draw clear lines about who is responsible for what. It's vital for us to have legal representation to clearly define and articulate who is responsible for the risk associated with our industry. That's an element coming from a market-driven perspective; customers are just trying to manage their business and manage their costs more effectively, and pushing more of those costs to their supplier bases is one of their strategies. So as a supplier, we have to be prepared to grow our business, but without absorbing more risk than we can insure or than we have priced into the services we provide.

Regulatory requirements are the other big external pressure on our company and on the industry. For example, CSA 2010 was a new body of regulations that were implemented in the transportation industry with the intent to create safer routes, which we all as an industry support. But there are onerous elements of regulation as well, so we need good legal representation to understand how the regulations change and what we need to do to stay compliant. That's an important role Benesch plays for us.

What are your plans for the future? Keep going and growing?

Absolutely! We have an incredible opportunity. In some part due to increasing regulations, there's been a compression of capacity in the transportation industry, so there is more demand than supply. It's created opportunities for companies looking to grow that have a good value proposition in the marketplace. We have that. We have the expertise we need to deliver for our customers, along with the right values and culture. And we believe we have the legal and technical expertise we need to build great solutions for our customers. Benesch is a big part of that.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

You should know that Marc Blubaugh is a sleep-on-the-airport-floor kind of lawyer to get to the seminar where he has to make an important presentation. That's the kind of guy he is. He'll do whatever it takes to take care of his clients. He does an awesome job of representing us. So we're happy!

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