

# BEST MANAGED

A JOINT VENTURE WITH CANADA'S 50 BEST MANAGED COMPANIES PROGRAM

## On the right road with safety focus

It takes extremely clear vision, focus, passion and tenacity to steer a trucking company through the kind of growth and success Winnipeg-based Bison Transport has been achieving since 1991, when the then-22-year-old company embarked on a growth strategy. Bison Transport has evolved from just 18 tractors and 32 employees to one of the largest truckload carriers in the country.

Today, it offers its customers across Canada and 48 states south of the border full-service logistics, yard management, warehousing and distribution as well as intermodal and complete trucking services with its more than 1,050 power units, 3,000 trailers and some 1,400 full-time employees.

A 50 Best Platinum winner since 1994, Bison Transport has been receiving a truck-full of awards year after year for its many accomplishments. In 2007 alone, Bison Transport won the Canadian Transportation and Logistics Shipper's Choice Award, The Meridian IQ/SCL (Supply Chain and Logistics Association) Award for Innovation and the Truckload Carriers Association National's Fleet Safety Award in the over-25-million-miles category for the last three consecutive years.

So, what is the driving force behind Bison Transport's success? It's the company's commitment to its driving force. "We have a primary focus of safety and have set up the environment within the company to ensure every driver is equipped to make the best and safest decisions when he is in the truck in any given circumstance," says Don Streuber, the company's president and CEO. The result is that Bison Transport's drivers will go the extra mile for the company and its customers — safely.

Empowering employees is a common theme discussed in today's business world. Many companies get the theory, understanding that it's the way to bring out the best in employees and create a truly successful team. But getting from theory to practice can be a tremendous challenge. Bison Transport has overcome the challenges by making this objective the company's primary focus and then putting in place all the real, practical structures needed to accomplish this goal.

It all starts with equipping workers with the tools and knowledge they need to be able to make top-notch decisions. That's exactly what Bison Transport has done. It was the first trucking company in Canada to invest in a driver skills development program with computer-based learning and the same type of simulation technology used by the military and aviation industry. This is not a make-believe type

of simulation: Bison Transport's Mark III Simulator is an authentic truck cab mounted on a motion base that captures the driving experience with such realism that it has been used for major research projects on trucking and driver safety.

Also key to employee empowerment is knowledge and communication. "We excel in the area of our processes and systems and the ability to capture data and use it effectively in the management of both people, customers, growth opportunities and challenges," Mr. Streuber says.

For example, the company developed an in-house driver information management system that keeps track of all key communication with drivers so that when anyone in the organization speaks to any of the company's drivers, they are up to date on what's going on. The company also has an intranet service that puts all the information the drivers need at their fingertips, whether they are in or away from the office.

"Throughout our business we endeavor to train people to make good decisions, and we then allow and encourage them to make good decisions, so there's an empowerment for for the driver to decide when the truck moves," Mr. Streuber says. "They make the decision of when it gets put in gear. But it's not just the drivers. It's everyone in the organization, from the person who publishes our newsletter — who is trained to understand what people want to read and then make decisions that provide employees in our entire company with interesting and educational material — to the dispatcher communicating with a driver who is maybe facing personal issues. Everyone has been given the tools and training to take ownership and make good decisions."

Another reason for Bison Transport's success in employee empowerment is that it has created a culture of pride in learning. Its employees can attend Bison University, which offers professionally taught business-skills development courses.

"I had an employee tell me that he was so glad he'd been able to attend Bison University because he had not been able to afford going to university when he was younger," Mr. Streuber says. "So there's enough respect for these courses that people are saying proudly, 'I'm capable of learning, too.'"

Another critical element in taking employee empowerment from theory to practice is for management to really listen to its employees and use their input to improve the company.

"Our employees have expressed concerns about our commitment to the environ-



Bison Transport CEO Don Streuber says his company has overcome a variety of obstacles facing the trucking industry by focusing on long-term strategies and analysis of industry trends.

ment," Mr. Streuber says. Some years back, the management took note — and action — and is now recognized for its commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility.

This spring, the company lowered the corporate speed limit for its trucks to reduce fuel consumption — and greenhouse gas emissions. Bison Transport is also an industry leader in Western Canada in the use of the more fuel-efficient Long Combination Vehicle (LCVs), which are twin 53-foot trailers. It has installed idle reduction devices in all its trucks and purchased aerodynamic packages for trucks and trailers to reduce wind drag on the vehicles and improve fuel economy.

Bison Transport's dedication to sustainability and lowering its carbon footprint on the environment has garnered the

company numerous environmental awards already, including the US Environment Protection Agency (EPA) SmartWay Environmental Excellence Award. And a few months ago, the Canadian federal govern-

**We allow  
the driver to do  
what is right in  
any circumstance**

ment awarded Bison Transport a \$500,000 grant to make energy-consumption improvements to its trailers.

Bison Transport is in an industry that has been hit hard by the effects of the strong Canadian dollar on exporters as well

as the rising costs in fuel, but the company is fighting back by being meticulous about gathering data, analyzing it and developing effective strategies.

"We are basing our business decisions on solid information, and utilizing that information to deliver cost-saving, innovative transportation solutions to our customers," Mr. Streuber says.

While the multi-award winner is proud of its accomplishments, being recognized as one of the best managed companies in the country has been an especially positive experience in terms of respect from the customers and suppliers, Mr. Streuber says.

But true to the company's focus, he adds, "It gives our employees a sense of pride and respect. I've had excellent employees say to me that they had two job offers and the fact

that we are one of the 50 Best Managed swayed their decision in our favour," he says. "We're nothing without our people."

"As part of the Best Managed process, we are seeing an increased focus among Canadian companies on making investments in their employees to foster a strong commitment to team-based success," says Rick Lunny, executive vice-president, CIBC Retail Markets. "This commitment has a positive impact on a company's brand and their ability to compete."

To find out how the Best Managed program can help your private company, visit [www.canadas50best.com](http://www.canadas50best.com).

And to get up close and personal with Best Managed companies, stay tuned to this page for upcoming profiles of past winners, their best practices and lessons learned.

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