

TRANSPORT TOPICS REPRINT: Automate Your Dock for Big ROI

By Ken Weinberg

Not much has changed since the 1970s when, as a young technology marketer, I stood on the docks of countless trucking companies for hours, sometimes days, clipboard in hand, trying to measure the time

and efficiency of dock management. Armed with data laboriously collected, I would confront trucking executives with the evidence that I thought would persuade them to invest in the latest technology of the day to automate wherever they could.

I cannot say I was totally successful in making my case.

Docks then — as they are now — were the forgotten stepchild of the trucking industry, places where activity would begin to heat up at night long after the senior staff had departed. No one, it seemed, really cared.

Today, we no longer have to engage in such intensive due diligence. Computers collect our dock activity data at lightning speed, and all trucking executives have to do is take the action required to save valuable time and money. But they do not.

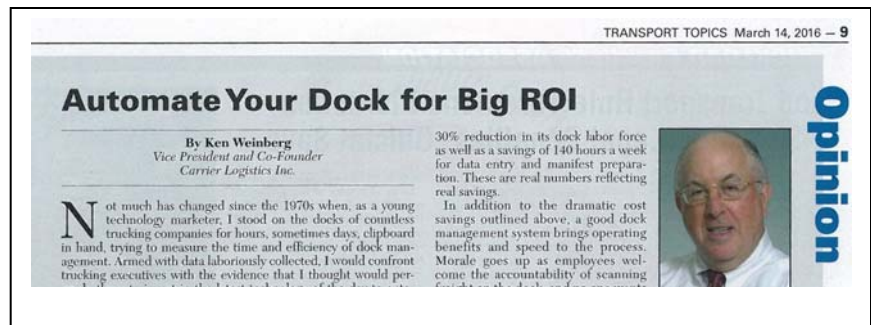
Many transportation companies, particularly less-than-truckload carriers and other multiple-stop carriers, still do not seem concerned enough with what happens on the dock. They invest substantial sums in their transportation management technology systems, typically in back-office and in administrative activities such as payroll and billing. They also invest in truck operations and mobile trucking technology. But, unlike courier and airfreight companies, few LTLs and multiple-stop carriers invest in technology for the dock. Why? It's largely because the dock is still out of sight to senior executives of the trucking company. Most dock operations are conducted overnight, between the hours of 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. Out of sight, out of mind.

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