Moving the Moving Industry Ahead with Technology
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Within the last decade, technology has become a primary driver of profitability and market differentiation in almost every industry. Currently, you’d be hard-pressed to find an enterprise that has not been working, at some level, to transform into a digital business. Organizations of all sizes are reimagining business processes, leveraging data analytics, making social and mobile connections and adopting innovations such as the Cloud.

**The moving industry is no exception. It’s come a long way technologically speaking.**

Think back to the way moving used to be before technology became ubiquitous. For everyone from private clients to corporate transferees, the logistics challenges started with finding and vetting a reliable service provider. Once the decision was made to hire a company, the paperwork began — including hastily scribbled and often inaccurate goods inventories, complicated quotes and confusing contracts. Moving also came with a host of potential problems, like poor communication, inefficient processes and a high degree of uncertainty for people on the move. The sheer effort it required was tremendous.

Today, the best moving and storage companies are turning to technology to improve their processes, heighten customer satisfaction and drive growth. And the savviest customers are using innovative digital tools to ease the burden of what has been called one of life’s 10 most stressful events.

**Searching for the Right Company**

Historically, the moving and storage industry has received its share of bad press, largely due to the unscrupulous behavior of a few opportunists taking advantage of open access to people’s most precious possessions. That makes finding a reputable and reliable service provider critical task No. 1.

While technology — mainly the Internet — makes it easier for the bad guys to pass themselves off as good guys these days, it also empowers customers to expose them, especially with the explosion of social media for information sharing. Checking online reviews provides important insights when considering which moving and storage company to hire.
There also are more official ways to investigate. Armed with a company’s Department of Transportation (DOT) license number, for example, anyone can make sure the enterprise has the experience and legal authority to perform a move. To find the facts, all it takes is a visit to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s Safety and Fitness Electronic Records System (FMCSA SAFER) website, safer.fmcsa.dot.gov. Using the Company Snapshot option, one search brings up a wealth of information, including the size of the company, its operation classification, whether or not the company is licensed to perform interstate and/or international moves, the type of cargo it can carry and its inspection record, plus insurance coverage. On its website, FMCSA also offers the ability to search for registered movers and view their complaint histories.

But the importance of technology in the moving process doesn’t end there.

Managing the Logistics

Once the decision of which company to hire is made, the challenge shifts to managing the logistics of a corporate relocation or private household move. Again, technology is providing solutions that fuel new levels of operational efficiency and customer service. Innovative industry leaders are using the latest devices, providing a full range of services in the Cloud and embedding software intelligence into every aspect of their businesses. And they are leveraging technology to harness the power of information by collecting data much sooner and using it to interact with customers, as well as act and react faster — and more intelligently.

By way of example, Atlas World Group, Inc. — the parent company of one of the nation’s leading moving companies Atlas Van Lines — has been in the vanguard of this evolution. Atlas provides domestic and international solutions for household goods moving, corporate move management, and full-service departure and destination services. In the last few years, the company also has established a significant digital advantage in the industry. Six times since 2009, Atlas has been included on the InformationWeek 500, a distinguished list of the nation’s most groundbreaking users of business technology.
“It used to be enough simply to be able to get trucks where they needed to go and deliver booked business,” J.J. Mohr, senior director of information technology for Atlas, said. “But in the last few years, the focus has moved beyond delivering things to delivering a great experience. Regardless of whether the customer is a single family or a large corporation that relocates staff and equipment all over the world, our innovative technology tools have become the key to supporting them with better service on the front end and more efficient processes on the back end.”

Improving Service Based on Data

Mohr reported the company has made leaps and bounds in improving core systems that impact the entire relocation process and in tying all those systems together in a proprietary platform. At its heart is the AtlasNet Customer Manager (ACM) database, a pioneering piece of technology written internally that gives agents the information they need to make the move process quicker and smoother. Designed to compile and index comprehensive customer information that can be shared across the entire organization, it ties everything together in one system—including historical customer information on past moves with Atlas. It eliminates duplication, as well as the need to piece together information from one system to another.

Using ACM, agents can search a customer’s history with Atlas, initiate the move process, and easily make updates and adjustments as they proceed through scheduling a survey, working up an estimate and sending move information along to dispatch. Information flows forward and backward efficiently.
Applying Innovation to Interactions

In addition to providing great one-on-one personal support through its agents, Atlas also has upped the ante with high-tech ways to interact with customers. Among the customer-facing technology solutions in its AtlasNet platform are several cutting-edge applications that streamline logistics and make service seamless.

The AtlasNet Survey app is a mobile in-home surveying and estimating solution that automates what used to be a problematic paper-based process. Using hand-held devices, Atlas representatives enter the details then interface with the Atlas information system to produce more legible inventories, more accurate pricing estimates and a higher level of customer confidence. Agents can show customers exactly what will be moved, where it is going, and how much it will cost.

From the estimate to the actual move, the AtlasNet Inventory application takes over, greatly improving the way shipment inventory is handled during loading and unloading, and even storage. It allows packers and drivers to bar-code scan the contents of the customer’s move, note the overall condition and keep accurate track of its whereabouts at all times. In addition, AtlasNet Inventory uses a paperless electronic signature capability that permits customers to securely sign off on documents using a mobile device. Inventory reports can even be printed or emailed directly from the app.

Taking Technology on the Road

More than just high-tech operations behind the scenes, Atlas also has evolved innovative solutions that provide access to data even on the road. Its fleet is equipped with on-board computer systems that allow 24/7 tracking and real-time flow of information across borders and time zones. This strong link enables up-to-the-minute reporting between the professional van operator and the operations center. It also allows Atlas to transmit information that customers can access online to track their shipment and immediately check the progress of their truck via a secure connection.
Conclusion

For moving industry leaders like Atlas, technology is creating a digital advantage in the marketplace. But technology is also driving the future of the business. As new tools emerge and new innovations get adopted, the potential exists to transform the moving experience into something a whole lot more streamlined, seamless and stress-free.

Hands-on Help in the Customers’ Hands

Customers who book with Atlas also get some customized mobile technical support. Each one receives free access to movr™, a powerful mobile app that can be used to plan and organize every aspect of a move. Developed by Avail Move Management, Inc., an Atlas subsidiary offering comprehensive relocation services, movr can help a customer buy or rent residential space, book necessary travel, transfer a vehicle, move household goods, connect or disconnect utilities, discover an Internet and TV provider and more, through vetted partners. Plus, there’s full access to Atlas moving tips and a customized moving checklist.