

TRANSPORTATION & LOGISTICS INTERNATIONAL

Tiger Cool Express focuses on building brand awareness to become the largest refrigerated intermodal carrier in the United States.

By Janice Hoppe-Spiers



March 5, 2018 -- [Tiger Cool Express](#) shipped its first temperature-controlled refrigerated intermodal container in 2014. In just four years, the company has grown quickly into one of the country's leading cold chain carriers. "I believe one thing that would surprise people is that we are already a top 25 refrigerated transportation company by revenue," CEO Steve Van Kirk says. "Because we're a young company, a lot of people wouldn't realize that."

TIGER COOL EXPRESS

www.tigercoolexpress.com

- Revenue: \$70 million
- Headquarters: Overland Park, Kan.
- Employees: 40+
- Specialty: Cold chain transportation solutions

"We make sure our customers feel confident that we have handled their goods the way they want it handled and delivered the way they want it delivered."

- STEVE VAN KIRK, CEO

Chairman Thomas Finkbiner and COO Theodore Prince, both industry veterans, founded the Overland Park, Kan.-based company with a goal of conquering a final frontier for long-haul shipment of perishables. Tiger Cool Express specializes in arranging movements of refrigerated cargo containers in the intermodal truck and rail business.

The company employs more than 40 people today and its staff includes a mix of industry veterans and newcomers. Van Kirk joined Tiger Cool Express in September. He previously served as president of Swift Intermodal for five years and spent 12 years at

Schneider National leading commercial, logistics and intermodal groups.

"I had worked in the intermodal industry and what excited me about Tiger Cool Express was the conversion of temperature controlled truckload freight to intermodal is the last great frontier that's out there," Van Kirk says. "The refrigerated temperature-control intermodal opportunity is massive and has barely begun."

Chief Commercial Officer Leslie Baird joined Tiger Cool Express in October. She says one of the things that has impressed her the most since coming aboard is the level of technology in terms of containers and operating systems. "For a new company, there is a lot of information at our fingertips that allows us to remain nimble in decision-making," she adds.

Bountiful Business

Tiger Cool Express got its start in the produce industry and is now well known as a reliable carrier in that sector. "When we developed the business plan, we really felt the last frontier for intermodal was perishables – specifically produce – because it was a long length of a haul, and that's traditionally where intermodal has succeeded," Prince says.

The company has since expanded its capacity to serve the confectionary, beverage, meat, seafood, dairy, processed food and health and beauty sectors. "Because we are relatively new to the service and industry, the exciting thing is now brand awareness and recognition," Baird says. "The company has done a nice job in the produce environment – they know who we are and that we provide a reliable solution for them. We are working with larger commercial customers and targeting customers in the wholesale food distribution, beverage distributors and other commodity types."

To expand its customer base, Tiger Cool Express has begun amplifying its marketing plans, which Baird says is evident through its digital and social media work. "We are really focused on getting in front of larger customers and building out what we do and what we offer at a time when the market is eager for new capacity solutions. We want to offer something unique and untapped on the commercial side while maintaining our footprint in the produce world," she adds.

Tiger Cool Express sees its greatest challenge in communicating its services to potential customers and gaining greater marketshare. “We aren’t going to equal team truck transit that some customers are used to, so we need to help them understand what we do,” Van Kirk notes. “We have reliable pickups, comprehensive control of the cold chain door-to-door and reliable time definite delivery. We make sure our customers feel confident that we have handled their goods the way they want it handled and delivered the way they want it delivered.”

In addition to improving its brand awareness, Tiger Cool Express expects an increase in marketshare this year because of the new electronic log mandate for truck drivers. The company expects an increase in business because intermodal will now be faster than solo trucks in many lanes. “The electronic log mandate is transforming the capacity and cost of our core competition, which is small trucking companies,” Van Kirk explains. “We need to solidify the value proposition we are trying to create for customers, which is an asset-based provider of temperature-controlled logistics.”

Smarter Logistics

Tiger Cool Express services a unique niche in the transportation industry as the conversion of truckload to intermodal refrigerated temperature-controlled logistics has just begun. The company has quickly gone from zero to 730 state-of-the-art 53-foot containers in four years, Van Kirk says. “We are working right now on getting our fleet to the utilization and price points we want to achieve,” he adds. “We will continue to invest in the fleet and are still working through timing, but will add more containers later this year and next.”

Containers are the company’s most valuable asset. Prince and Finkbiner say they saw containers as the only logical way to start Tiger Cool Express. “If 40 to 50 percent of your expense is related to rail, and double-stack containers is significantly more economical than trailer, it doesn’t take a lot to figure out containers are the way to go,” Prince explains.

Tiger Cool Express’s containers are equipped with electronically controlled monitors to communicate the location of the product and the temperature. “It puts us in a position to systematically show our customers who might have concerns about the Food Safety Modernization Act the temperature range their product moved at,” Van Kirk explains. “We help them deliver a high-quality product to their customers.”

The company provides 24/7 live support and logistics solutions from its headquarters. Tiger Cool Express customers can receive real-time updates on where their product is located and the temperature inside the container with its trip monitoring technology. Each container is also equipped with door alarms to preserve the integrity of the cargo.

Tiger Cool Express prides itself on offering environmentally sustainable logistics processes with equipment that exceeds California Air Resources Board requirements. The company significantly reduces its carbon footprint by going intermodal and its containers are equipped with fuel-efficient 120-gallon diesel tanks with fuel monitoring.

Moving forward, Tiger Cool Express plans to be the largest temperature-controlled intermodal logistics provider in the country. “Our goal is to focus on delivering

something that excites our customers, deliver great service and great value, and being a transportation partner our customers can have confidence in,” Van Kirk says. “We need to focus on really understanding our customers’ needs well. We only offer service and we need to be really, really good at it and everything else will follow.”