Uber Freight opens up truckload capacity network to rival brokers

The new product will be firewalled from Uber Freight's internal brokerage business. Photo credit: PeopleImages – Yuri. A / Shutterstock.com.

Eric Johnson, Senior Technology Editor | Nov 14, 2024, 12:35 PM EST

Uber Freight on Thursday opened its network of truckload carriers to fellow freight brokers under a new product called Broker Access.

The product, which is operated independently of Uber's own freight brokerage business, gives other brokers the ability to expand the pool of capacity available to move truckloads for those brokers' shipper-customers.

Broker Access, in some ways, mirrors the development of a similar product at the now-defunct freight broker Convoy, which in 2021 launched Convoy for Brokers to similarly give other brokers access to drivers within its network. Convoy's technology was later

acquired by forwarder Flexport, which earlier this year restarted Convoy for Brokers under a new name, the Convoy Platform.

The commonality between the two products is leveraging a network of hundreds of thousands of truckload drivers who have downloaded the companies' respective mobile apps. Those apps allow drivers to book loads, sequence multiple loads (something Uber Freight calls re-loads) and automate other workflow aspects in the shipment lifecycle.

Uber Freight sees Broker Access as another channel for brokers to find capacity outside of contracts with truckload carriers and posting spot freight on a load board, Brooks McMahon, the company's vice president of emerging products and business development, told the *Journal of Commerce*. Key to enabling this third path is that some carriers are embracing mobile apps as workflow enablement tools, not a technology nuisance.

"We think it'll continue to happen, where more and more carriers will want to work this way," said McMahon, who spearheaded Convoy for Brokers before joining Uber Freight in late 2023. "But there will always be a place for relationships and there will always be a place for load boards. Keep doing what you're doing and consider this another path to get access to this new carrier base."

As brokers look for vetted carriers outside their network, there is a cohort of drivers who are embracing apps such as Uber's because they're technologically savvy or English is a second language and they feel disadvantaged when business is conducted over the phone, McMahon said.

"Programs like this sort of level the playing field for carriers," he said.

Data behind a firewall

One key behind the Broker Access offering is that it utilizes the same back-end technology that Uber Freight uses for its own brokerage business, but data is kept behind a firewall, so the Uber Freight brokerage business isn't advantaged.

"We've got different tables for all of our data," McMahon said, acknowledging that overcoming the perception that Broker Access isn't independent is important. "We have access controls. We don't share data with the [third-party logistics] teams. They don't share with us. So, we truly have put up walls. We have to offer this the right way."

McMahon said Uber Freight has been trialing Broker Access with a group of brokers since May.

The product can be accessed by brokers via application programming interface (API), electronic data interchange (EDI) or via a web-based interface. The API and EDI connections allow external brokers to enable automated workflows around tendering, booking, tracking and payment reconciliation, but the web interface is there for smaller brokers not yet ready for integrations but who still want access to drivers using the Uber Freight app.

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