



The 2025 Guide to a Profitable Trucking Business

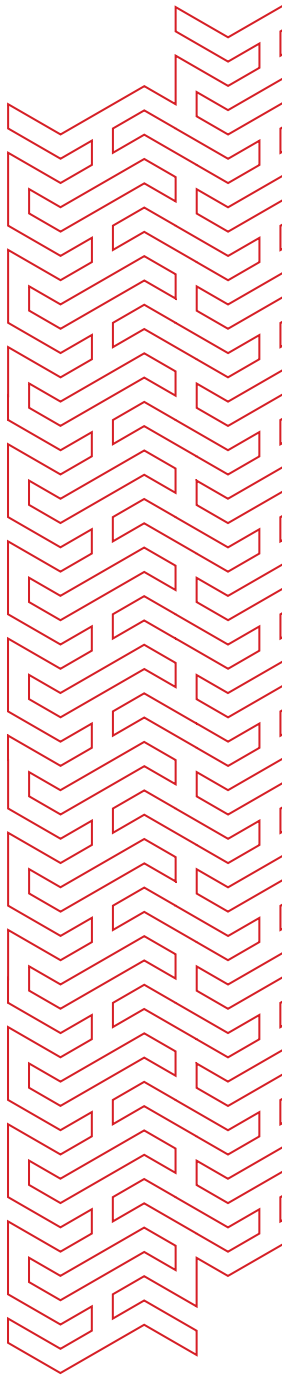
How to Survive in Any Economy and Through All Market Cycles

Let's be honest—running a trucking business isn't easy. Between rising fuel costs, unexpected maintenance, and the constant threat of fraud, it can feel like the odds are stacked against you. However, with the right tools and strategies, you can protect your profits—whether you're an **owner-operator** with a few trucks or a carrier managing a fleet.

This guide offers cost-cutting measures and operational tips to help you save time and money, build resilience, and make smart decisions in 2025 and beyond.

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Fuel: Get more miles for your money

Fuel is one of the biggest **operational costs** for truckers. While you can't control fuel costs, you can take some actions to **minimize your fuel consumption**.

And when they're all performed in conjunction, the savings can help you squeeze out any additional profit margins.

Top ways to lower your fuel consumption

- » **Check your tires:** Tires with high rolling resistance, the energy it takes your tires to rotate, waste fuel. The **Department of Energy** estimates that 4 to 11 percent of fuel consumption is due to tire rolling resistance. Industry studies show that a 10 percent drop in rolling resistance equates to about a one percent improvement in fuel economy.

Grab that advantage by making an **informed tire purchase**. Tire technology advances have made it so you no longer have to choose between excellent grip, long tread life, or rolling resistance. Look beyond the purchase price to consider the long-term costs. Some of the priciest tires deliver both excellent traction and long life, making their true cost of ownership among the lowest, especially when you consider the fuel savings.

- » **Slow down:** Every mile per hour over your truck's optimal speed, around 60 MPH, burns more fuel. Ease off the gas, and you'll save big over time. Even a slight decrease in your highway driving speed can significantly **reduce your fuel consumption**, and only adds a few minutes to your total travel time.

According to the **Department of Energy**, every five miles per hour (MPH) you drive above 60 MPH is like paying an additional 24 cents per gallon for fuel. That's because at higher speeds, your truck encounters more wind resistance and your tires encounter more rolling resistance.

- » **Find your engine's "sweet spot.":** The "sweet spot" is the most efficient revolutions per minute (RPM) to run your engine. If your engine is working harder to drive at a certain speed, you will burn more fuel. The trick is to use torque, not horsepower, to pull your load. Pulling with torque means you're sustaining your speed without overworking the engine. An ideal sweet spot hovers between 1250 and 1350 RPM. Every truck engine varies, so check your owner's manual or your truck dealer to understand your peak horsepower and torque at a specific RPM. Just remember, the lower the RPM, the less fuel your engine will consume.



- » **Use a fuel card:** Generally, owner-operators can expect to pay the cash price or less when using a **fuel card** and can save up to 30 cents a gallon with the help of a fuel card.

Large carriers with big fleets negotiate **fuel cards** that earn them points and discounts based on purchase volumes, delivering savings as much as a dollar off per gallon. Independent owner-operators can also negotiate for fuel savings. Discounts might be either a flat percentage of the total purchase or monthly rebates.

A fuel card can also help you simplify your accounting and prevent you from losing valuable receipts or missing expenses. Many fuel cards will link right to your accounting software or cloud-based fuel management platforms, eliminating the need to keep your physical receipts or manually record your fuel purchases.

Need a fuel card that fits your business?
Truckstop's Partner Marketplace, available to load board customers,
connects you with top fuel providers.

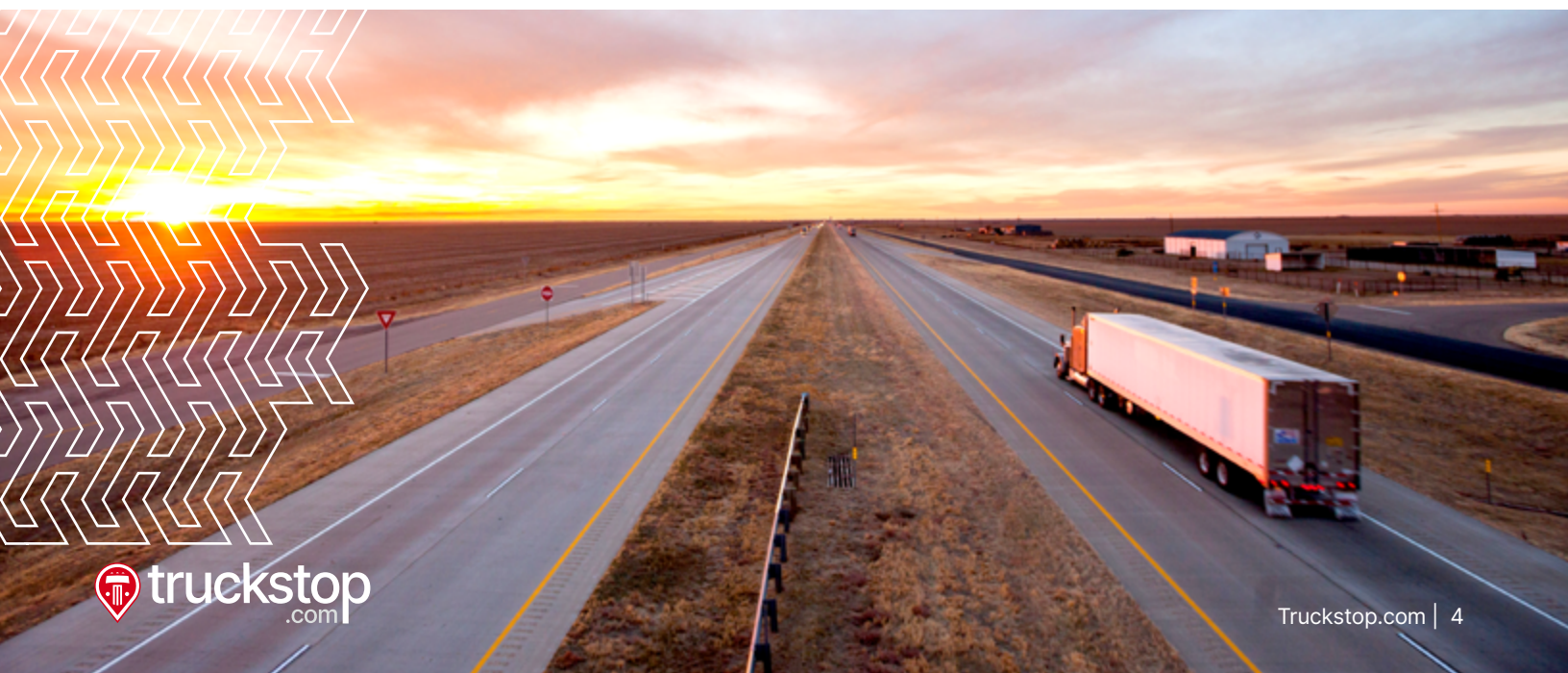
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- » **Plan your routes:** Once you book a load, don't just hit the road with no return plan. Make the most of your time by working to eliminate **deadheads** and driving empty miles.

Route planning also helps you avoid the temptation of speeding to meet a delivery deadline. For instance, if you're facing an eight-hour haul and you only have nine hours to get there, you might be tempted to up your speed, raising your fuel costs. If you plan your routes in advance, you'll avoid these types of tight time constraints that wreak havoc on your wallet (and cause unnecessary stress).

Also, consider the number of off- and on-ramps. Your truck burns more fuel on an on-ramp as it works to get up to speed. Avoiding them improves your fuel mileage.

- » **Know the lane data:** Good route planning starts with knowing the data for the **lanes you'll be driving**. Take a close look at the rates for each load on those routes to see if they're fair and competitive. When you know the numbers, you're in a better spot to negotiate and land the best deals.



- » **Understand the fuel surcharge index:** Fuel surcharges can make a huge impact on your overall operating expenses. Negotiating your rates by understanding the **fuel surcharge index** helps you negotiate fair and profitable rates.

For example, if you see a rate that looks good but doesn't account for the current fuel surcharge, you might be leaving money on the table. Even negotiating five more cents can move the needle and help you determine if you're making enough money on a load.

Consider these questions prior to negotiating your rates

- » **What is an accurate baseline fuel price?** Fuel surcharges only kick in after the baseline fuel price is reached. The baseline fuel price you set in your contract is often based on the current price of fuel, but you can also select a standard base fuel price that will be more flexible over time.

- » **Have you implemented fuel surcharge caps and floors?** A fuel surcharge cap is the maximum surcharge a carrier can charge a shipper. Even if the surcharge cap is met, the carrier cannot charge the shipper more—regardless of whether the cap price reflects the actual cost of fuel. Carriers that implement a cap can risk losing money in the event that fuel prices skyrocket.

Conversely, a surcharge floor is the minimum surcharge that a carrier can charge a shipper. In the case that fuel prices dip below the floor, the shipper will still be required to pay the agreed-upon amount.

- » **Should you negotiate a fixed or variable fuel surcharge?** Decide if a fixed fuel surcharge or a variable fuel surcharge best fits your business.

A fixed surcharge is a set amount that does not change based on changes in fuel prices. This is advantageous when fuel prices are expected to remain stable for an extended period of time.

Variable fuel surcharges rise and fall along with fuel prices. Implementing a variable surcharge structure during periods of fuel price volatility lets you avoid the risk of having to cover the costs of dramatic fuel price changes.



Get the data you need to negotiate a rate that covers your costs and leaves room to pay yourself a decent wage with Rate Insights, a feature of **Truckstop Load Board Pro.**

Truck maintenance: Stay on the road longer

Unexpected breakdowns and truck repairs don't just drain your wallet—they cost you valuable time. If you're already running on tight margins, a major repair could be enough to sideline your truck and even put you out of business.

The good news? Staying ahead with a solid maintenance plan can keep your truck in top shape and save you time, money, and headaches down the road. A little effort now can go a long way toward avoiding costly surprises later.

Tips for smarter maintenance:

» **Stick to a plan:** Maintenance should include regular daily pre- and post-trip inspections; fixing defects as soon as you're aware of them; and a scheduled program that routinely checks airlines, hoses, brakes, wiring, and alternators. A service schedule can help you stay on track when it comes to common maintenance checkpoints. However, you should still consult manufacturer recommendations, as they can vary.

Some maintenance can be DIY to save money, but make sure to consult an expert for complicated issues that need the attention of a professional. The goal is to get your truck back on the road as quickly as possible. But it's better to do it right the first time to avoid roadside breakdowns.

Our [Preventative Maintenance Guide for Carriers](#) is a great resource for everything you need to know to keep your truck running like a well-oiled machine, including advice on common maintenance issues and best practices for keeping your truck in top condition. It even includes [detailed checklists](#) for daily, weekly, monthly, and annual inspections.

Maintenance Items	Normal-Heavy Duty	Severe Duty
Classic Lube	15,000 miles	15,000 miles
Battery Service	6 Months	6 Months
3-axle Alignment	Every 12 months	Every 12 months
Oil Change/B service	4,500 miles or 1,300 hours	35,000 miles or 825 hours
Air Filter Fuel Tank Vent	12 months	6 months
Power Steering Fluid Filter	150,000 miles	150,000 miles
Battery Service	6 months	6 months
Valve adjustment	150,000 miles then every 300,000 miles after the first overhead (valve adjustment)	150,000 miles then every 300,000 miles after the first overhead (valve adjustment)
DEF System Service	150,000 miles	150,000 miles
AHI Clean/Replace	150,000 miles	100,000 miles
DPF Filter Clean/Brake	400,000 miles	250,000 miles
Coolant Filter Replace	300,000 miles	150,000 miles
Coolant Replace/Flush	750,000 miles	750,000 miles
Transmission Filter/Fluid Replace	500,000 mi or 60 months	500,000 mi or 60 months
Fan/Accessory Drive Belt Replace	300,000 miles	150,000 miles
Differential Oil Replace	250,000 miles	150,000 miles

» **Save for the unexpected:** You can't make money if your truck is inoperable. Even small savings help offset costs. Try to build up a savings fund that can handle a worst-case hit. Depending on the age and condition of your truck, the chart below gives a good guideline of how much you should be saving.

Truck Age/Mileage	Savings Per Mile
New	5 cents
1 year or 150k	6 cents
1 year or 150k	6 cents
2 years or 300k	7 cents
3 years or 450k	8 cents
4 years or 600k	10 cents
5+ years or 750k+	15 cents

» **Know when to DIY:** Handling basic maintenance yourself can save money, but don't hesitate to call in a pro for bigger jobs. A quick fix isn't worth it if it leaves you stranded later.

» **Plan for the long haul:** As your truck racks up miles, consider its lifespan. A rig with a million miles might cost more in repairs than it's worth. At some point, upgrading to a more reliable truck can save you money and keep you on the road.

Taking care of your truck isn't just about avoiding breakdowns—it's about building a resilient and successful business. A well-maintained truck keeps you on schedule, ensures safety, and drives profitability.

Understand your operating costs, including how much to allocate for maintenance, and factor those expenses into your negotiated rates. Strategic planning and negotiation are key differences between successful drivers and those struggling to get by.

Also, think about your truck's "use cycle." If your truck has hit a million miles, you're likely facing frequent mechanical issues that could sideline you completely. At a certain point, it may be smarter to invest in a **new or reliable used truck** that requires fewer repairs and keeps you on the road consistently.



Time management: Make money faster

You've heard it at least once, probably more: In trucking, time is money. But it bears repeating. Whether you're a new or seasoned owner-operator, you're running a business. Effective time management can make or break you.

The more time you spend on the road making money, the better. You will not be compensated for the necessary back-office tasks that still must be done, like creating invoices and billing brokers, looking for brokers to work with and fostering relationships, tax reporting, and FINDING LOADS, the very heart of your business.

Here's how to make the most of your time:

- » **Leverage a load board:** Use a reliable **load board** that serves up not just quantity, but quality loads. To avoid wasting time on dead ends, duplicate loads, and loads already taken, choose a load board that offers up fresh loads in real time; verified, vetted brokers; and rate negotiation tools that draw from trusted industry data.

The Truckstop Load Board helps you find the right loads that match your requirements—and fast. Compare loads side-by-side and set up alert notifications based on your preferences so you never miss a great opportunity again.
Learn how to get started.

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- » **Choose loads wisely:** Strike a balance between booking high-paying loads and hauling more loads. While securing the **highest possible rate** is always ideal, having plenty of loads in a given lane gives you more negotiation power. However, the amount of freight you haul also matters. Savvy carriers aim for the sweet spot. Sometimes, it's better to take a lower-paying load if it helps you avoid exceeding your **Hours of Service (HOS)**. In these cases, a modest rate that covers your costs and still turns a profit beats having no load at all.
- » **Use routing software to plan the most profitable trip:** Successful carriers know route planning is more than just finding the fastest way from Point A to Point B. The goal of every trip is to make the most money for your time and avoid or eliminate driving empty. If you know how long you can be out on the road—whether it's three days or three weeks—choose a string of several loads that will pay the most money for your time overall. Some of those loads might pay high rates, some might be a bit low, but look at the whole trip to find the combination that returns the profit you need for the time you're out.

Invest time in route planning to make the most of your time and earnings. Choose **truck routing software** that's easy to use and delivers positive results for your business.

- » **Ditch the time-consuming paperwork:** Paperwork is trucking's dirty little secret. Most owner-operators didn't choose the gig because they love the tedious tasks of running an office. Still, it must be done. To get paid, you have to invoice brokers. To **file taxes**, you need to track earnings and expenses.

A good **Transportation Management System (TMS)** can take the grind out of these tasks, automating the busywork so you can focus on hauling more loads and earning more money. Whether you hire a bookkeeper or manage it yourself, staying organized and on top of your costs will keep your records accurate and give you a clear picture of your finances.

Be ready come tax time!

Tax season doesn't have to be stressful. For tax tips and best practices for maximizing deductions for your trucking business, get our comprehensive tax checklist.

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- » **Make electronic logging devices (ELDs) work for you:** Carriers are paid by the mile, which means time spent in traffic, waiting for loads, or stuck at a dock is unpaid. You're working, but not earning. So, if you're detained by a shipper or stuck at a loading dock for pick-up, you're not being paid for your time, even though your job requires you to be there.

ELDs automatically record your time so you get paid for it. You can even use this downtime to find future loads. And that's time well-spent.

- » **Put your smartphone to work for you:** For navigation, route planning, and even finding the best fuel stations and truck stops, your mobile device can be one of your most useful tools on the road. A little research on **the best apps for trucking** can help you find the ones that meet your needs. Ease-of-use should be a top priority, plus specific features designed to make your trucking business run smoothly from anywhere.



Fraud: Stay safe and secure

Fraud continues to run rampant in the freight market. Bad actors are becoming smarter and more sophisticated, and it's hitting the trucking industry hard. You can protect yourself by staying vigilant about knowing what types of fraud to look for and ways to prevent it from interfering with your business.

Theft in the trucking industry takes many forms, and fraudsters are getting more creative every day. Some target online payment systems, duplicating invoices and submitting fake ones to steal your hard-earned money.

Here are the main types of fraud that specifically target freight carriers and independent owner-operators:

» **Cargo theft:** Cargo theft can occur when a criminal poses as an authentic carrier and intercepts haulage instructions, falsifying cargo pick-up or delivery documentation to steal loads, or poses as a freight forwarder and gives a driver false instructions. They act as a middleman between a legitimate hauler and shipper, giving the driver new instructions and an alternative address, where the cargo is then stolen.

And then there's the more straightforward kind of theft—**goods being stolen** directly from your truck, whether it's parked or in transit.

To protect your business and cargo, it's crucial to stay vigilant, verify instructions, and use secure systems.

» **Phishing, smishing, and quishing scams:** Scammers have plenty of **tricks up their sleeves**, and it's important to know how they operate.

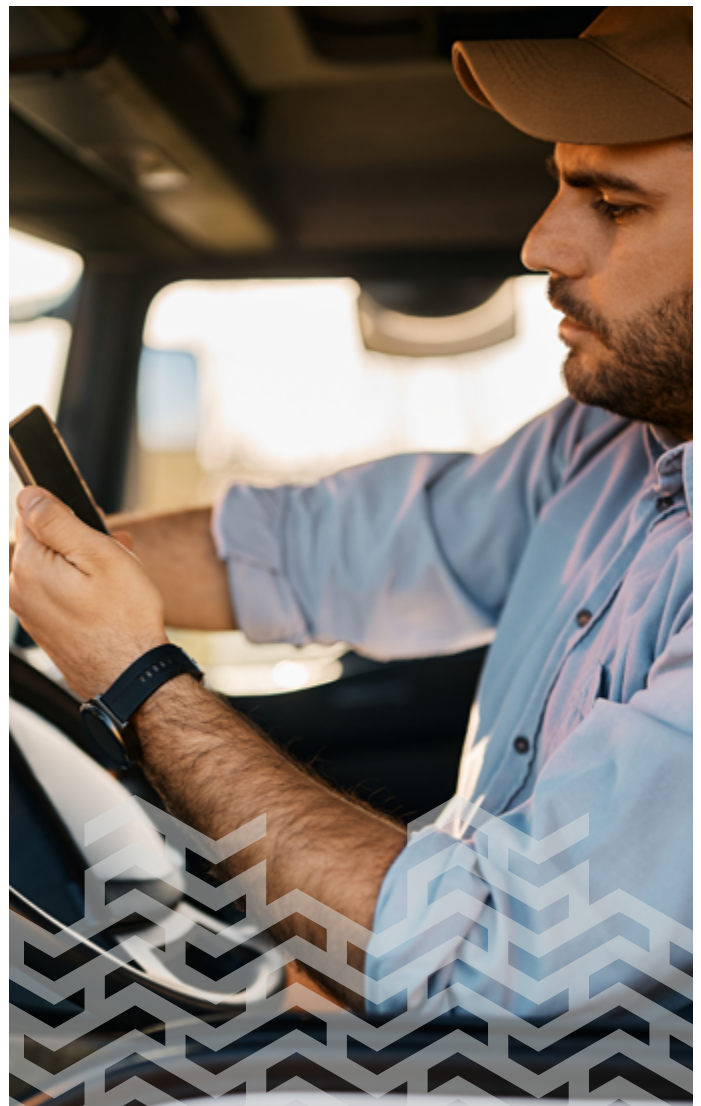
Phishing scams typically come in the form of fraudulent emails or fake websites, often targeting business email accounts.

Smishing works the same way, but through text messages instead. Both aim to trick people into sharing passwords or other sensitive information by impersonating official sources. Scammers use these personal details to steal identities, access accounts, and commit other types of fraud.

Quishing is a newer threat that uses fake QR codes to lure people into visiting malicious websites or downloading harmful software. This can lead to identity theft, unauthorized payments, and serious data breaches.

To stay safe, always be cautious with emails, texts, and QR codes. Avoid clicking on links from unknown sources, and never share your passwords—no legitimate company or individual will ever ask for them.

» **Factoring scams:** Factoring has also become a **target for fraud**. Scammers will send fraudulent advance pay notices, either inflating the numbers of a real invoice or requesting payment for a service they didn't provide. Partnering with a reputable **freight factoring company like Truckstop** with tools in place to identify suspicious activity and stop bad actors can help keep you safe.



- » **The DOT scam:** Scammers are getting bold, even pretending to be DOT representatives or law enforcement during inspections. Sometimes, a fraudster contacts a trucking company claiming there's a violation that needs immediate payment.

Another common tactic is sending fake letters to trucking companies, asking for payment to renew their USDOT number. Remember, renewing a USDOT number is free and can only be done through the FMCSA website.

To protect yourself, stay informed about legitimate DOT processes and never send money or share sensitive information without verifying the request.



Ways to protect your business from fraud

While fraud is on the rise, there are steps you can take to help identify suspicious activity. Start by implementing these best practices.

- » **Thoroughly vet everyone you work with:** Never do business with another carrier or broker without investigating them first to **verify their identity** and trustworthiness.
- » **Avoid re-using passwords and log-in numbers:** Using the same password for all your accounts can expose you to security risks. Create unique passwords and log-ins, and change them frequently.
- » **Communicate:** Don't hesitate to ask questions, especially if you notice suspicious behavior. Verify details with all involved parties, and dig deeper if the specifics of a particular load seem unusual or don't quite add up. Keep friends and family notified of your whereabouts and check in regularly.
- » **Take physical security measures:** Pay attention to your surroundings to protect you and your freight. Park safely (in view of security cameras if they exist) and invest in a dash cam. Always use locks, security seals, and security devices if the cargo you're in charge of is susceptible to theft. Report any suspicious activity to law enforcement.
- » **Alert the FBI to suspicious behavior:** The misconception that authorities aren't actively working to prevent and stop scammers often deters people from reporting freight fraud. But **federal agents at the FBI take cargo theft very seriously** and rely on verifiable information to track and disband major theft organizations (MBOs). **Report suspicious behavior** to help them track down criminals and increase awareness for this growing problem to avoid becoming a victim.

Stay ahead of cyber threats

Keep your trucking business safe with our Cybersecurity Checklist for Carriers. It's packed with simple, practical tips to protect you from scams and help keep your business secure.

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Building a trucking network you can trust

Join the right communities

Industry organizations are great places to learn and expand your network. They offer everything from helpful resources and updates to events and mentoring programs. These groups focus on supporting truckers and helping you succeed.

Top organizations to consider:

American Trucking Associations (ATA): A leading voice in the industry, offering resources, legislative updates, and networking opportunities.

Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA): Focused on the needs of owner-operators, providing advocacy, educational resources, and community support.

Women in Trucking (WIT): Aiming to promote the presence and success of women in the industry, WIT offers networking events, mentoring programs, and educational resources.

Listen to industry podcasts

Podcasts like **Freight Nation** are perfect for picking up tips and staying in the loop while you're on the road. Whether you want to improve your business or just hear stories from the industry, there's a podcast for you.

Get social

Social media isn't just for fun—it's a powerful tool for truckers. Platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and X let you connect with other drivers, share your experiences, and even find new business opportunities.

Dive in to online forums

Forums like **TruckersReport.com** and Reddit's **r/Truckers** are great for swapping advice, solving problems, and sharing stories. Got questions? Ask away. Have knowledge to share? Build your reputation while helping others.

Stronger, Smarter Trucking Operations in 2025

Running a successful trucking business in 2025 is no small feat, but with the right strategies and tools, you can be successful. Whether it's lowering fuel costs, staying ahead on maintenance, embracing new tech, or protecting yourself from fraud, it all adds up to a stronger, more profitable business. With preparation and smart decision-making, you can stay ahead of the curve and keep your business moving forward.

