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Daily Direct plans 'massive' expansion

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Wauwatosa-based Daily Direct, which hauls motorcycles across the country, has launched an ambitious growth plan that company owners hope will more than quadruple its revenues this year.

"It's called massive growth," says Jeff Lloyd, who invested as an owner of the company in 2001 and who has since helped formulate the growth plan. "We looked at an entirely different operating plan."

That includes a greater national presence, with a two-phased plan to open hub-and-spoke facilities in 14 cities across the United States, with Phase I including Nashville, Denver and Kansas City.

"We're in the real estate market," Lloyd said.

The company plans to have the first new facility operational within the next 30 days.

"It's very difficult to cover the entire United States from Milwaukee in a timely manner," Lloyd said. "Without these locations, our total expansion plan is non-existent."

The plan will require Daily Direct to purchase semi tractors and trailers to complement its current fleet of eight. By the end of this year, "we hope to end up with, roughly, 30 units," Lloyd said. By the time Phase II is completed, the company would be a 100-truck operation, he added.

Those are no ordinary trailers. They're custom-made to carry approximately 35 motorcycles, on average, on a two-deck system. Stoughton Trailers, in Stoughton, Wis., will make the units.

"That's a huge order for Stoughton," Lloyd said. "You can buy a trailer for \$35,000 to \$40,000, but these will cost us \$80,000 apiece because of the specifications we require."

Add on a custom hydraulic tailgate for \$25,000 and a custom paint job, and the economic impact of the order becomes even more significant, adds Ken Durik, whose father started the business in West Allis in 1988, hauling beer bottles and other items. It started hauling motorcycles in 1994, but didn't make the bikes its main focus until Durik bought the business from his father in 1998.

"We're doing a lot of constructive and creative financing," Lloyd said.

More trucks obviously means more drivers.

"I'd love to have all these units in place today, but they have to build them and we need to hire drivers," Durik said.

Some of that manpower increase will come via owner-operators, Lloyd said.



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But no matter whether they are Daily Direct employees or owner-operators, they'll have at least one thing in common -- they will all be motorcycle people.

"We're all motorcycle owners here, which helps us appreciate what our cargo means to the owners of those motorcycles," said Steve Kohlmann, who does sales and marketing work for Daily Direct.

While the U.S. is losing semi drivers in droves -- many are just getting out of the business, Daily Direct doesn't expect any problems finding drivers for its new units.

"Drivers call us every day wanting to drive for us," said Tim Evens, general manager of Daily Direct.

The company also anticipates the need for additional office staff, including sales and marketing personnel, but it sees technology as helping make the growth possible.

"We're trying to be as automated and efficient as we can," Lloyd said.

That includes a Web site, www.haulbikes.com, where a potential client can determine an actual hauling fee through a rate calculator and then sign up for shipping. It's also where motorcycle enthusiasts can find information on rallies and events, and information on motorcycling hauling.

With its truck equipped with Global Positioning System equipment, delivery tracking will be added to the Web site in the future, Kohlmann said.

"The Web site has been a tremendous help in getting the company where it is today," he added. "Other haulers might have pricing estimates or quotes that will be e-mailed to you latter; ours is immediate exact pricing."

Daily Direct is aiming for a guaranteed national delivery time of seven days, with a 12- to 14-day period during its growth phase.

"When Phase II is complete, we will be able to haul a motorcycle from Seattle to Miami -- 3,500 miles -- in seven days; that's a pretty good move." said Lloyd, who is also co-owner of Lloyd Transportation in Pleasant Prairie and Lloyd Transportation of Ohio, affiliates partner of Tampa-based Quality Carriers.

The multi-hubbed system could give the company a timing advantage over the numerous other motorcycle haulers throughout the U.S.

Phase II expansion cities include Las Vegas; Twin Falls, Idaho; Seattle; Salt Lake City; San Francisco; Dallas; Tallahassee, Fla.; Wilmington, N.C.; Scratton, Pa., and a yet-to-be-determined city in New Mexico.

Daily Direct hauls motorcycles and like machines such as jet skis and snowmobiles for individuals and for distributors. The explosive growth of motorcycle sales via the Internet has given the company an expanding market, while rallies such as the recent Harley Davidson anniversary provide other means of business from clients who, rather than driving directly to or from a rally, want a bike shipped.

The machines are picked up and delivered on a door-to-door basis, and handled "as though they were our own motorcycles," Durik said.

It's all done through Daily Direct's 13,600-square-foot building on 124th Street just south of Hampton Avenue in Wauwatosa, with about 12,000 square feet of

that space for storage and staging. The company moved into the building last year, when its revenues were \$1.5 million -- double those of 2002. This year, it's looking at \$7 million in revenues.

"The motorcycle market is growing; it's really starting to explode," Lloyd said.

April 2, 2004 Small Business Times, Milwaukee, by David Niles, of SBT

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