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DEALING WITH AN EXPANDING MARKET AREA

Petroleum marketers who work with continually expanding markets face a variety of challenges. Milwaukee-based Quick Fuel has seen its geographic range double in five years, and is familiar with both the positives and negatives that come with a national footprint. No one wants to turn down new business, and there are a number of synergistic advantages that come from serving customers in multiple markets.

From a sales viewpoint, Quick Fuel has found that if you have one satisfied branch, it is relatively easy to find new business serving additional branches of the same company. The customer at the initial branch trusts your service and can be a valuable in-company reference for other branches.

Consistency is a key benefit for fleets who are tired of reconciling a variety of invoices and services from multiple vendors. Vendor consolidation can lead to major cost reductions for fleets with a national or regional presence. By consolidating fuel services, a customer receives the same invoice, the same fueling reports, and the same consistently reliable service. Knowledge is critical: To operate profitably in today's difficult economic times, fleet managers have to manage their fuel usage, and having one consolidated reporting system is a necessity for analyzing fuel costs.

Internally, serving multiple branches can lead to operational efficiencies for a jobber. No one makes money when delivery trucks sit idle for days at a time.

If a company services several markets, trucks and other resources can be deployed to other, busier locations.

Shared resources come into play in emergencies. Hurricanes, ice storms and other disasters can drain a fueler's resources. Quick Fuel has been able to meet the increased demand for fuel after hurricanes by sending trucks and drivers to Florida from other parts of the country.

While rapid expansion may seem like a dream come true, it can have a downside as well. There can be a loss of control. The owner of a small jobber can oversee every aspect of the business, from making sure trucks are clean to providing custom reports for each customer. When a business serves fleets throughout the country, it takes special effort to maintain uniform standards.

Internally, the business may become more complicated. Serving different cities and states requires a knowledge of local taxes and regulations, which can add to the administrative workload. It may even require a cultural change, such

as providing internal and external documents in several languages.

Modern technology can help mitigate many of the issues that arise. Quick Fuel uses *FuelEdge*,™ a state-of-the-art automated delivery system, in all of its trucks. Bar codes are affixed to customer fuel tanks, and drivers scan the barcode before fueling. All fueling data is then transmitted back to the corporate office.

The system accurately processes data for billing and reporting, and provides valuable internal reports that allow Quick Fuel to rapidly process routes and maintain accurate inventories. From a sales viewpoint, *FuelEdge*™ gives customers the ability to view and download fueling data online shortly after a delivery has been made. From an administrative viewpoint, it can completely automate a company's back office functions. *FuelEdge*™ also ensures accuracy, safety and reliability with every delivery. **ign**