



*NAVIGATING THE  
ROAD TO SUCCESS*

*SIX STEPS TO BUILDING A  
PROSPERING GROUND  
TRANSPORTATION COMPANY*

*by John M. Greene*

With all the modern technology that has flooded the market to assist us in getting the client from point A to point B as quickly as possible, perhaps nothing has impacted us more than the advent of the GPS. Unfortunately, no matter how sophisticated they make it, or how many technological upgrades we download into it, there is no GPS capable of showing us the correct path to building a successful ground transportation company. For that, we have to go “old school” and use a business road map, one that points out six important stops along the way as we rock on down that highway en route to creating a successful company. Buckle up.

### 1. Growth Through Acquisitions

Part of your long-term business strategy should be to grow through acquisitions as they present themselves to you. My company has done five acquisitions in the last six years, and it has allowed us to show significant growth without a serious outlay of capital. Acquisitions also allow you to collect valuable assets—not just personnel and vehicles, but those very important client contacts as well. Gasoline drives our vehicles, but a brand new, freshly minted client list from a recent acquisition is the real fuel that powers our success. Our most recent acquisition was a straight asset purchase which included the company’s customer list, website, and access to all its corporate business—a virtual goldmine.

### 2. Outside Sales

Emails, phone calls, LinkedIn messages, and even Skype meetings all serve a purpose in our “not-enough-hours-in-the-day” busy business lives. But you should never ignore the power of that rare opportunity to shake a hand, pass a business card, or look someone straight in the eye without being filtered through a computer monitor. Join local ground transportation associations, be seen at limousine conventions, and make your presence felt at your local chamber of commerce. Build your brand by talking to people face-to-face. It’s something with which no fancy, high-tech, graphics-loaded website can ever compete.

### 3. Inbound affiliates

This just makes sense. If people are flying out of your city, then most assuredly they are also flying in, and you also want that business. Inbound affiliates are not to be taken lightly when you are putting together a business plan. In fact, they can be a major

source of your revenue. For our company, six out of our top 10 clients are other limousine companies referring us their inbound work. More than \$4 million of our annual revenue is a direct result of inbound affiliate sales. Do what you need to do to cultivate those important relationships, and do it right.

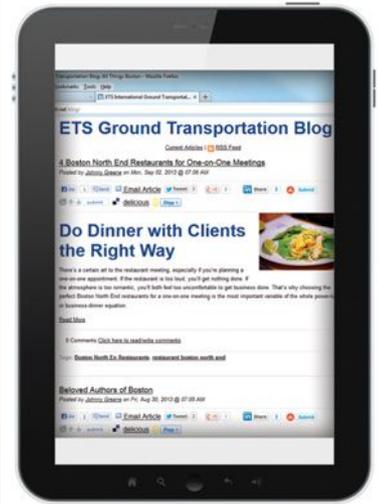
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### 4. Outbound Marketing

There are a number of key ways to reach potential clients, starting with good PR. Never think of yourself as being in the witness protection program: you want as many people to know about you as possible—in a positive light, of course. Send out press releases to local publications and trade and association magazines about the good you do in the community, charitable endeavors, new hires, acquisitions, bumps in your technology prowess, your green initiatives, etc. Send them your company newsletter, put them on your e-blast or e-bulletin list, drop them a postcard. If you are fortunate enough, utilize bylined articles and try to get your expertise on specific subjects printed in major trade publications that affect and impact your industry, such as *Limo Digest*. Then send the link to that published article far and wide. You can also utilize traditional outbound marketing avenues, such as print and online advertising, radio ads and direct mail pieces.

## BEST IN BLOG

ETS has turned blogging for the ground transportation industry into an online work of art



AS PART OF BUILDING AN ONLINE PRESENCE, most, if not all, companies attempt to start an online blog, or weblog as it was originally known. Loaded with great intentions, most companies also stop “blogging” as frequently or stop altogether within a few months—the main reason being that most companies don’t have a whole lot to offer in terms of valuable information or the time to sit and compose meaningful articles.

With that being stated, ETS is the rare exception of a company devoted to their blog. Not only are they devoted, but they are also unique in delivering articles daily—chock-full of educational content for anyone in the ground transportation industry. Many of the articles are geared toward the city of Boston and the surrounding areas, but they also offer informative entries on topics that anyone in the business can learn from.

For example, “**Master Corporate Travel, Even When Money’s Tight**” offers insight into saving money and suggests ways you can upgrade your flight and hotel reservations without spending any more dollars.

Another entry, “**Make the Right Impression With an Executive Limo,**” lists creative ways to provide for the comfort and enjoyment of your potential business partner.

ETS prides themselves on their connection to their customers—and their commitment to maintaining and continually amping up their blog with rich, educational content is certainly something to brag about. To check out a blog that has set the bar in the industry, go to [drive.etsintl.net/blog/](http://drive.etsintl.net/blog/).

### 5. Inbound Marketing

I firmly believe that inbound marketing today is what websites were 10 years ago. The sales process has changed dramatically over the past 30 years, when all it took to get in to see a client was a phone call and a briefcase. Or, if you were really lucky (and gutsy), you just knocked on their door unannounced. In the good old days that decision-maker would have been the president, or the company's executive assistant or the company's travel manager. But in the era of company downsizing, a lot of travel decisions are being made in the procurement department. This means the person who now orders ground transportation has probably just gotten off the phone from ordering those plastic mats that go under office chairs.

So now you need them to come to you, which means you want to increase your Google presence and your social networking capabilities. Each month we do two blogs and one e-blast which are generated through our website and social media channels such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, etc. Then our sales team, each of whom belong to at least 50 social media groups (i.e. corporate travel planners, wedding planners, travel associations, etc.), send it to their contacts, and so on. Since we implemented inbound marketing, we have already seen the number of contacts who entered our company website through LinkedIn alone jump 35 percent. Finally, one of the most critical aspects of good inbound marketing can be summed up with two simple words: follow up. Companies like Hub Spot and Inbound Marketing Agents can be instrumental in helping you coordinate all aspects of your inbound marketing program.



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“For the past year we have worked with John Greene at ETS to align their marketing and sales funnels into a lead-generation machine,” says Bill Faeth, CEO of Inbound Marketing Agents. “But the key element is conversion, which requires targeted offers based on the leads buying cycle. You need to know your prospects and deliver the right information at the right time to get prospects to convert to customers.”

### 6. Customer Service

I saved this for the very end because even if you hit a home run with the previous five suggestions, you are only going to wind up like “Casey at the Bat” if your primary focus isn't on servicing the client. I don't mean just meeting their needs, but exceeding their expectations. And keep in mind, those expecta-

tions will continue to grow. Travelers will continue to have high expectations as they search for better value. They'll expect to be picked up by a well-trained and courteous chauffeur who shows up when and where he's supposed to. He'll know where he's going, isn't talking or texting on a cell phone during the trip, doesn't have Van Halen blasting on the radio, and is quick to offer the customer a bottle of cold water and magazines that aren't two and three years old. An astute observer once pointed out, “the back of a limousine shouldn't look like a doctor's office.”

Chauffeurs constitute the direct link between your company and the client. They have to be friendly but not necessarily *buddy-buddy*. The client needs a knowledgeable, courteous, capable driver, not a new BFF. As someone once pointed out, “the biggest variable in terms of quality of experience is the chauffeur.”

So as you see, even without a GPS system to lead you to the financial promised land, there are ways—six, in fact—to be successful in this tough, profit margin-thin industry. It's a road that can be successfully navigated, even with all the obstacles seemingly looming ahead, if you use these six steps as outlined. And if you do, chances are that all those obstacles will soon be in your rear-view mirror, leaving a wide-open road ahead as you strive to build a successful ground transportation company. **LD**



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**JOHN M. GREENE** is a 25-year veteran of the limousine business, and president and CEO of ETS International in Randolph, MA. ETS International has an affiliate network of more than 350 limousine companies throughout the U.S. The company won the Limo Digest Show's 2011 Image Award for Best Marketing. John Greene can be contacted at (617) 804-4801 and [jgreene@etsintl.net](mailto:jgreene@etsintl.net).