OPERATIONAL CHEAT SHEET

10 BRIGHT IDEAS TO BUILD AND GROW YOUR NEMT BUSINESS

If you’re just starting out, or trying to grow your operation, learn what to expect and why NEMT scheduling software is what you need to thrive.

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Many questions arise when providers first take the steps towards starting or building a NEMT operation. If you’re interested in starting a NEMT business, you’ve picked the best possible time. The demand is going to be huge over the next 20 years. This means that you have guaranteed customers, waiting for your service. The non-emergency medical transportation industry is unique in so many ways. Having a van and a desire to work may be enough to begin service in your community, but it may not be enough to support the growth that you may want for the future. Is this what you want? Even though demand will be at an all-time high, so too will be the competition to provide NEMT service. Are you prepared for that as well?

If you are just starting out, approach your state’s Department of Health and Human Services and learn more about the certification process as well as transportation licensing. This can be a time-consuming process so don’t expect to be operational overnight. Plan for a year-long process to establish your small business. This is okay, because you’re going to need the year to build your business plan, marketing plan and purchasing / customization of vehicles (hydraulic lifts, tie-downs), hiring of personnel and NEMT scheduling software.

If you’re currently in operation, you will want to consider tools to enhance that operation. Now is the time to learn about NEMT scheduling software and the efficiencies available through an automated and integrated system. Your entire operation can be monitored, managed and streamlined to get the most efficiency and therefore the highest profit possible out of your daily trips.

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1. Know What You Want

Seems like a simple idea, but many small business owners fail to ask themselves this simple question. Do you want to stay small and serve a comfortable group of clients, or do you want to become a state-wide brokerage? If you wish to remain a local, grassroots service provider supporting your community, then continue on the path you are on: this can be taking trip requests, building relationships with your modest client-base and delivering high-quality transportation services. Even as a small operation, there is still a need for operational efficiencies and automated scheduling software, so you may want to find a more scalable solution that can first get you off the ground.

If, however, you wish to grow your business for profit and expansion, you are going to need to start off on the right foot. In which case, keep reading. Among the tools to help you thrive, your NEMT scheduling software will be able to scale up as you grow, enabling that growth along the way. So once you’ve determined what you want to achieve with your operation, you’ll know what tools are the most suited to help you reach your goals.

2. Are You Planning to Fail?

The simple response is, “well then don’t fail to plan.” Assuming that your main goal is to increase your service and client base, and work with a state-wide or regional NEMT brokerage company to import trips, you need to make a business plan. Detail the size of your current operation or the size you believe you will need once you begin operation. How many vehicles are required, and how many need modifications specific to NEMT consumers? For example, vehicles may be required to accommodate trips with stretchers and wheelchairs. How many trips per day are you (or plan to be) running? How many more can you safely handle before errors begin to creep into your operation? Your call takers and dispatchers must work together to ensure that all trips are booked quickly and accurately. You can’t afford to send a vehicle (or the wrong vehicle) to the wrong location.

Begin by making a 5-year plan. Where do you want to be in the next five years? What will your clients expect in the next five years? Create sales targets as well as quarterly goals so you can benchmark your success as you progress. This goes not only for sales goals but also for marketing goals. How many retirement centers, assisted living facilities or hospitals know about your company? How can you increase that number?
3. Don’t Forget to Plan for Expenses

If you don’t already operate a NEMT service you need to be prepared for start-up expenses before you build your pricing model. Be aware of the following areas.

1. Insurance
2. Transportation licenses and permits
3. Registration fees

Also be aware that each state has different requirements and you may need to register your company in the same way as a taxi company, which can be costly. Each state has its own vehicle certification policy, which can add to the expense of operating your fleet. While insurance is fairly standard from state to state, it will vary depending upon the insurance provider. Be sure to shop around and use an insurance broker who understands both small business, as well as transportation insurance. You may also incur costs from the approval process of the state department of health and human services and from Medicare/Medicaid. Now is the time to consider how your operation will comply with HIPAA standards. You will need to demonstrate that your operation addresses privacy and security legislation with regards to the handling of Electronic Health Records. Your NEMT software vendor should be able to work with you to in order to create a product that protects your operation.

Also be sure to check with any agencies that license ambulances in your area. You may be intruding on a small market and therefore, not in a good location to build a brand.
4. Determine How Much to Charge

Exploring your competition will give you some ideas as to what is currently available. This can include various forms of transportation providers: taxis, ambulances, wheelchair vans, municipal ADA-complementary transportation, volunteer drivers, etc. Take a look at NEMT operations of similar sizes and those that offer a similar service to yours (in a similar location). Examine their pricing models, their geographic delivery area and the size and type of their fleet. What services do local retirement centers and assisted living centers offer to their residents and clients? Make a pricing and service plan that is competitive.

Research your potential clients. Your pricing model can reflect your community’s ability to pay as well as their expectations. You are competing with taxi services and public transit options. What sets you apart will become your marketing advantage when you approach your community for their business.

Remember that price is not the sole decision-making factor for consumers of NEMT transportation. This is why the next step is to identify your customers in order to find out what they actually value and deserve.

5. Your Competitive Edge: What You Can Offer

Look at your current or future customers. What do they potentially love about your service? For many start-up NEMT providers, it is their personal touch that is so valuable and appreciated by their clients. You understand the unique needs, preferences and requirements of each of your clients. You may know each of them by name. This is an approach that no provider wants to lose. No matter the size of an operation, clients will prefer to use a service where they feel appreciated and well cared for. You are more than a taxi service, you are a health care partner. That being said, you also need to be the number one choice for your clients when they are booking a non-insured trip. This is your competitive advantage over paratransit and ADA-complementary transportation offered by public transit agencies. You are personally attentive to the needs of your clients. You offer service beyond expectations.

Being competitive in the NEMT market requires you be able to have certain standards, such as:

1. On time performance guarantees
2. Safe and properly equipped vehicles
3. Drivers with clean records
4. Error-free trip planning
5. Predictable service

If, in ten years, you have ten times the business, will you still be able to offer the same level of personal attention? This is why as a business grows, automated scheduling and dispatching software that can scale up to meet your business goals becomes an essential tool.
6. Know Your Clients’ 5-year Plan, Too

If you have current clients that you intend to retain, you need to be aware of what they may potentially require in the future. This can include concerns for non-emergency medical transportation, but it can also include other life events that precipitate other health care needs. A client may be mobile now, but may require a mobility aid in the coming years. They may be living on their own now, but may eventually require scheduled, in-home caregiver visits. They may eventually require regular medical appointments due to complications stemming from asthma, diabetes or COPD. They may require additional transportation space for a personal care assistant. Will you be able to accommodate the shifting needs of your clientele?

In the future, you may be required to manage and monitor an interdisciplinary team of caregivers as well as provide on-time transportation services. If you intend to grow alongside your clients, you will need to have a system in place well in advance that addresses this complicated scheduling of events.

Maintaining a close relationship with your client base is essential. This way, as their needs change, you can change and grow your service offering. Even if your operation begins to work with a brokerage, your clients will still ask for you specifically.

7. Build and Market Your Brand

The odds are slim that you will be launching a television advertising campaign during the Super Bowl. That being said, you still need to get your name into the minds of those that are in need of your service. In the NEMT industry, word-of-mouth advertising has better reach and has a longer effect on business than most other marketing tactics. Begin by researching your local senior centers, retirement and assisted living facilities and health care providers. When they discover a NEMT provider that is dependable and has quality drivers / reservationists / vehicles, they will be eager to share you within their community. And once a client develops a relationship with a NEMT provider, they are less likely to seek another.

Become involved in community groups, senior activity centers and health care provider groups. Ask for advice from these resources. In order to be successful, you need to build trust and loyalty among your clients. In the NEMT industry, this means being on time, providing impeccable service, having a simple trip booking process, ensuring quick complaint resolutions and more.
8. Look Beyond the Five Year Limit

Many NEMT providers are considering diversification as a necessary step for maintaining a thriving business. After all, it makes sense to increase the profitability of your resources. Why have a vehicle sitting in a parking lot when it could be out making money? As such, consider offering other services, such as delivery and home health care. If this is in your sights, create a strong foundation right now. You’ll need to have a system for client management that can accurately store and recall personal information, medical history, mobility aids, drug requirements/interactions, etc. that will be essential should you eventually book health care providers on top of transportation.

Why is software essential for managing health records and all types of scheduling events? Once a certain amount of trips per day is reached, it becomes extremely difficult to make sure that every event is scheduled properly and each appointment is kept. A client’s day can quickly become complicated once you consider the coordination of a trip to a doctor’s office along with a home visit from a care giver. On top of that, you also need to book the return trip and make sure each vehicle is appropriate for the medical and personal needs of each client. This will require the scheduling power of software. As the day’s schedule changes, your software will enable dispatchers to re-calculate and re-optimize all events so little is left to chance.
9. Build Towards Doing Business with Brokers

It goes without saying that brokers want you to succeed. They want you to be reliable. They want to pay/reimburse you quickly and have you import trips accurately. If you’re going to grow, you’re going to need to work closely with brokers to fully enable your operation, both financially as well as for your credibility.

When a broker sends out trips (with all pertinent client and trip data), they expect you to be able to deliver each trip exactly as they order it. There is little room for data entry errors, including client information, Electronic Medical Record (EMR), addresses, locations, times, vehicle types, pick-up and appointment times, etc. Brokers are using NEMT software in order to monitor their provider clients. They use it to create a competitive environment for NEMT providers. If you are slow, inaccurate and unpredictable, you will not get their business. And without their business, you are less likely to grow your business.

Here’s what they expect from a NEMT provider:
1. Proof of on-time delivery
2. Digital log entries and odometer readings
3. Accurate client management
4. Correct vehicles sent
5. Error-free trip booking
6. Efficient claims and invoice management:
   a. Billing data for trip type
   b. Knows funding sources
   c. Integrates with broker’s own system
   d. Integrates with payroll system
10. NEMT Software Will Help You Grow

We are vendors of NEMT software, which is not a secret. However, the reason why we believe NEMT software is necessary is because it enables transportation providers to grow their business while continuously offering high-quality service. If you're looking at long-term investments in your small business, the expense of implementing an automated scheduling system with integrated client management will be negligible. No company thrives without the tools to help it operate faster, on a larger scale and to do more with less.

As you take on more responsibility, perhaps with added services such as delivery and home health care, your scheduling power will be tested. Software offers advantages that are more than mere convenience. They can provide assurance and build your credibility. Your billing process will be accurate. Your reimbursements will come quicker. Your brokers will trust you and therefore outsource more trips to you. Your complaints will decrease. Your incidence of no-shows and late cancelations will be reduced.

We are able to provide two types of software: TripSpark NEMT and Simpli Software. Learn which solution is right for your operation based upon number of trips per day, size of your fleet, your client management needs and budgetary requirements. They try a customized demonstration of the software using a subset of your own schedule information. You'll see how much time you can save in the trip booking process and how your clients' trips can be scheduled automatically. In the end, you'll discover that every second saved is a dollar earned and this accumulation of resources contributes to the growth of a NEMT operation.

TripSpark Technologies offers cutting edge software solutions for NEMT providers and brokers to enable operational efficiencies and help ensure that data handling procedures comply with HIPAA standards. With over 20 years of development and growth, TripSpark can deliver on its promise of superior service and products so you can deliver on your promise of superior service and care.