



WestAir Gases and Ryder

Leading the way with a custom natural gas fleet

WestAir Gases is an independent distributor of gases and equipment with a broad range of products and services to suit the needs of each customer. The industries they serve range from food and beverage to aerospace and healthcare. Whether you're a small business or large corporation, WestAir's focus is quality service when you need it. A large inventory selection and broad range of locations provide accessibility and convenience for customers to keep their companies in production. WestAir's philosophy will always remain the same: "Large Enough to Serve, Small Enough to Care."





CHALLENGE

With aggressive goals to shrink its carbon footprint and fuel costs, WestAir Gases needed a solid plan and deep commercial fleet expertise to transform its transportation.

When WestAir Gases wanted to convert its fleet of trucks from diesel to natural gas, its decision was sound. As one of the largest independent distributors of gases, gas equipment and welding supplies in the Southwest United States, the company set an aggressive goal to shrink both its carbon footprint and fuel costs.

Going green and saving money in the process makes a lot of sense for WestAir, whose customers operate in many competitive industry sectors, from lab and life sciences to metal fabrication and food and beverage.

SOLUTION

With natural gas available at predictable, stable prices, the adoption of natural gas vehicles offered a clear economic solution. Ryder's natural gas transportation and mobile maintenance solutions enable WestAir to achieve their carbon emission reduction goals.

Delivering products on time and in perfect condition is a crucial service WestAir provides to them. In some cases, as with the hospital clients WestAir serves, delivering on time is literally the difference between life and death.

With its clients' needs in mind and a commitment to the environment, WestAir hopes to become a leader in natural gas options, aspiring to be known across its customer base and beyond as a steward of the environment and a cost-effective, top performer.

RESULTS

Reliable

Ryder's mobile maintenance operation and team of expert technicians ensure optimal fleet performance

Replacement trucks and trailers available as back-up in the event of a breakdown

With a fleet operating safely and at maximum performance levels, WestAir can reach its overall growth goals over the next few years

Cost Savings

Substantial cost savings resulting from a reliable, cleaner-burning fuel and fleet efficiency upgrades

Efficient

Maximize vehicle uptime for improved on-time deliveries

Cutting-edge diagnostic and repair equipment provides the most advanced preventive care to the fleet



WestAir's Journey: From Concept to Conversion

As the company began to explore natural gas transportation options, there were challenges, notes Steve Byers, president and chief operating officer of WestAir Gases, which has been based in San Diego, CA since the company was founded in 1970. The cost of the conversion would be substantial, trucks would need to be modified to meet practical and performance standards, new health and safety issues would need to be addressed, drivers would need to be re-trained, and a maintenance system that operated 24/7 would need to be created. At the same time, it was important that WestAir maintain its top-notch customer

service, in keeping with the company's philosophy: "Large Enough to Serve, Small Enough to Care."

"We could only achieve our goal with an extraordinary partner," says Byers. "One who understands the time pressure we operate under and shares our sense of urgency when it comes to delivering at optimum level for our customers. The only way we can differentiate ourselves from the competition is by doing what we do better – delivering on time, every time. It only takes one bad experience to ruin a reputation, and we must minimize that risk at every step in our execution."

For every step in WestAir's conversion journey, Ryder had a solution, says Austin Romesberg, vice president of WestAir Gases. The company was "head and shoulders better than its competition" in showing the way forward to success.

"Had Ryder not offered the solutions, I don't know that we would have been able to do it," he adds. "The team at Ryder was dedicated to offering the best costs to enter natural gas, the best vehicle options and the best service."

Expertise Made Ryder the First Choice

WestAir was able to jump the cost hurdle to convert to natural gas largely because Ryder had already begun preparing for the conversion nationally by obtaining incentives from local governments committed to going green. Ryder has a program dedicated to finding these subsidies and the businesses that could benefit from them.

Ryder's business model makes the company uniquely positioned to help the advanced fuel vehicle industry reach critical mass. With more than 30 million real-world miles of experience, 17 natural gas maintenance facilities and 1,300 certified natural gas vehicle technicians, Ryder is the leader in natural gas vehicle solutions for the commercial transportation industry. Ryder has also deployed Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) vehicles into its customers fleets in California, New York, Maryland, Michigan, Texas, Arizona, Utah, Georgia and Louisiana, as well as in Canada. The company also operates Liquefied to Compressed Natural Gas (LCNG) fuel stations at its Fontana and Orange, CA service locations, and an LNG fuel station at its Fulton, GA maintenance facility.

Ryder's commitment to helping companies make the transition to natural gas has been recognized nationally. Inbound Logistics magazine has included Ryder in its "Green Partners" listing for five years in a row, and the company is a charter member of the NGV Fleet Forum, as well as a member of the Department of Energy's National Clean Fleets partnership. Ryder is also a recipient of the 2011 NGV Achievement Award.



From left: **Steve Byers**, President and Chief Operating Officer (WestAir), **Bruce B. Hubbard**, Business Development Manager (Ryder) and **Austin Romesberg**, Vice President Operations (WestAir)

Armed with government subsidies that Ryder obtained for WestAir's conversion to a natural gas fleet, it was now time to ensure the new trucks could meet WestAir's delivery needs. Originally, WestAir's diesel vehicles were straight trucks with custom bodies. However, Ryder's pre-built natural gas trucks did not have the custom bodies required by WestAir. Together, the two companies designed a natural gas truck with the custom bodies necessary for moving the tanks and other equipment that WestAir required. Today, the new natural gas truck configuration has these custom features: custom trailer with Westair's original bodies on them, designed for transporting tanks and other equipment, natural gas power unit, and storage area to transport additional natural gas replacement units for use when fuel gets low.

Special attention was made to getting the weight of the trucks just right so they could perform at optimum natural gas consumption levels between fuel stations. The trucks

were extensively piloted before WestAir permanently integrated them into their fleet; a process that Byers called crucial to building the company's confidence in making its conversion to natural gas.

Reaping the Rewards

Currently, WestAir has nine CNG trucks that are used for short haul trips and two LNG trucks that are used for long haul purposes. The company hopes to expand its fleet because the benefits to the trucks' new and custom-built configurations were many, Romesberg says. They are more flexible, so when a power unit goes in for service, WestAir just switches and hooks up another one – a time-saving element that was never present in its daily distribution system prior to the conversion. In addition to flexibility, the trucks' maneuverability is improved, their mileage compared to fuel usage is greatly improved, and Ryder provides mobile maintenance – allowing certified technicians to service any truck wherever it may be in WestAir's delivery network.



“Overall, Ryder shines because they definitely have a strong belief in a relationship and partnership. To find a company that shares our core belief in taking care of our customers - one that is willing to work on solutions and shares our sense of urgency - is rare. Ryder is that partner.”

- Steve Byers, President & Chief Operating Officer, WestAir Gases & Equipment

“It doesn’t matter what time it is, or what the situation is - time and time again Ryder’s team comes through for us to take care of any maintenance needs and provide a substitute truck, if necessary. They have a total dedication to service,” says Byers. “We are never left high and dry; we are always on the road.”

In addition, drivers for WestAir are empowered to play an important role in the company’s conversion to natural gas. Ryder provided training to help them successfully navigate the changes with the new vehicle technology and stay safe in the process, Romesberg notes.

“The training was fantastic and hands-on with Ryder,” he says. “Even though we have seasoned drivers, the new fleet required

different delivery schedules due to the fueling process and new ways of addressing daily challenges - such as shifting routes to accommodate fueling, learning new health and safety procedures and working with trucks that have a greater range of maneuverability. Ryder is collaborative with them in this effort, and together they routinely find many creative solutions to challenges.”

Ryder’s total dedication to innovation, creating highly specific and unique solutions, and provision of exemplary service not only helped WestAir increase its performance levels and sustainability practices, it also significantly boosts the company’s ability to grow, Byers says.

Growing great

Within the next five years, WestAir expects to double its business, extending its footprint throughout the Southwest United States and beyond. The company also hopes to enter the natural gas fuel station market as proven experts in the natural gas field - having achieved the conversion itself. Now armed with its green fleet, that important goal looks even more achievable, Byers says.

“We love to share the fact that we are going green,” he adds. “It’s not only the right thing to do, but many customers truly appreciate this effort.”

To do the right thing, both for the environment and business, it takes leadership, innovation and flexibility. Together, WestAir Gases and Ryder are delivering custom natural gas solutions that are greener, smarter and Ever better™.



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