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COURIER **MAGAZINE**

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Jake Hatling Makes a
DASH for Success

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Jake Hatling started DASH with \$200, a truck and a laptop.

Jake Hatling Makes a DASH for Success

One truck, a laptop and \$200. That's how Jake Hatling started DASH Delivery Service (Minneapolis, Minn.) in January 2000. Today, steering a group of 75 drivers and 10 staff members, DASH brings in about \$2.5 million annually. But Hatling's start-up was fueled by a few intangible items he had up his entrepreneurial sleeve: experience, a keen business sense and the drive to reach for the top.

Before Hatling started DASH, he owned FasTrack Couriers with a partner. During their five years in business, they "did okay ... we made a living," said Hatling. But that wasn't enough for him.

"I knew which way the industry was going from attending *Courier Magazine* conferences and networking with other courier company owners," he said. "I knew we needed to invest in technology and infrastructure."

His partner disagreed, so they split and Hatling started DASH and never looked back.

Service Offerings

- On demand
- Dock truck
- Legal
- Route/Scheduled
- Medical/Specimen
- NFO/Air freight
- White glove/2-man crews
- Refrigerated van

Lessons Learned

Hatling's \$200 start-up money didn't go far, but the lessons he learned at FasTrack did.

"I learned to be patient," Hatling said. "Things seldom run smoothly, so you learn to work things out without getting out of control. I also learned that every customer has different needs and the cookie cutter approach doesn't work."

Those lessons pointed the way for DASH to offer customized business solutions. As he saw a need, Hatling reacted with the niche solution to remedy the problem, like offering white glove service before most people even knew what it was. Each solution led to increased success. When approached by a pharmaceutical company in Duluth that needed prescriptions delivered in 2005, Hatling opened a branch office there. That move not only accommodated the pharmaceutical company and gave DASH a great account, it also brought about a great deal of new business to meet the unique requirements of the Duluth area.

"It's a different type of customer in Duluth," Hatling explained. "It's a big city with small town values and the people there don't like to be known by a number. We know everyone there by name."

More recently, one of the country's largest food distributors came to him to ask if he could handle refrigerated deliveries. He secured a refrigerated van and another new service was born.

Today, the company does a large variety of work, but the bulk is a mix of white glove and medical. So the question comes to mind: *What's the next niche to watch in the industry?* "I don't know," Hatling said. "But if it's out there, I'll find it."

Hatling's Tips for Success

1. Be flexible in meeting your customers' needs.
2. Reach out to other local courier companies.
3. Always have someone selling.
4. Use the most up-to-date technology possible for the size of your company.
5. Set high goals, and then reach them!



Top route driver Doug Hatling is Jake's father and a vital part of the family business.



Tasha Rozell, sales rep and former driver, balances sales with customer retention.

Distinction in the Crowd

Hatling's *always-looking-for-the-next-challenge* attitude has brought him great success in a relatively short period. In part, this is due to his ability to see what the future holds. Hatling has a formula for handling one of the most difficult and consistent issues in the industry: balancing drivers with jobs.

"I measure the metrics," Hatling said. "I look at our history and look ahead one month, three months, six months and a year. I know if our sales people are making 21 calls, they will have five successful attempts and the result will be two sales. The cycle for those sales is usually two months. By automating the sales process, I can balance my drivers and jobs."

matter what it is, he's either done it or knows someone who has. And he's never stepped on my toes."

Hatling's philosophy is not only altruistic; it's a good business maneuver since DASH benefits by the overflow work while building mutual trust. "It takes a lot of trust to let another company be your backup," Hatling said.

Tricks of the trade like these usually come only as a result of long periods of trial and error, but not for the fortunate courier companies of Minneapolis. Hatling believes in sharing what he's learned, so when a new company opens in the area, Hatling personally welcomes them into the industry. He offers his services as a backup and counsels them with the many lessons he's learned over the years.

Wilaby agreed: "I wouldn't work with just anyone in this type of business arrangement. This is a very competitive business and there are a lot of cutthroat people out there who would steal your business in a minute. Jake's an outstanding businessman, though. In fact, if I am going to lose a customer, I'll call him and suggest he go after it. I'd rather he get it than anyone else."

"I tell them I won't go after their work and I offer to sign something attesting to it. As a result, they won't steal my accounts and I benefit from their overload."

Goals and the Future

The future is looking good at DASH. A firm believer in the fact that someone needs to be selling at all times, even busy ones, Hatling has a sales rep, Tasha Rozell, working on future business.

One such courier company owner is Wade Wilaby of **Falcon Delivery Service** (Minneapolis, Minn.), who called Hatling seven years ago because he needed help with overflow.

"I used to be a driver, so I understand both sides of the job" Rozell said. "But I find this end much more rewarding. We have a great reputation, a wide variety of services and a real leg-up with our new technology."

"He's been a mentor to me ever since," Wilaby said. "He supports me and gives me advice when I have a problem. No

Rozell refers to the complete



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Becky Hatling, Jake's wife and company president, keeps the office running.



Jack Dunn handles warehouse management and dispatching duties.

technological overhaul the company experienced this past October when it switched to *Xcelerator* software, went totally paperless and purchased mobile tech units for bar-coding and scanning.

“As you grow, you have different software needs,” Hatling said. “You can’t go after big companies without good technology.”

That technology, along with DASH’s reputation, allows the courier company to keep loyal customers like Aspen Medical. Although Allina acquired Aspen over a year ago – and Allina has its own courier system – Aspen has chosen to remain with DASH because of the consistently exceptional service.

Mary Ellen Dercks, director of Aspen’s business office, praises the work DASH has done since she took over in 2000. “We require nine to 10 spots delivered to and from every day and it can be confusing. With DASH, all we have to say is ‘Here’ and they make it happen. They’re professional, pleasant to deal with and always on time.”

Pleasing customers and acquiring new ones is all part of the plan for Hatling, whose goal is to reach the \$5 million mark within the next two years.

“After that,” Hatling said, “the sky’s the limit.”

About the Author

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DASH Factoids

Founder: Jake Hatling

Date founded: Jan. 1, 2000

Annual sales: \$2.5 million

Number of drivers: 75

Locations: Two Minnesota facilities - Minneapolis and Duluth

Charitable contributions: DASH offers free delivery services to Cheerful Givers (www.cheerfulgivers.com), a non-profit organization that distributes toy-filled birthday bags to children living in poverty. Hatling also offers assistance to local charities through the men’s group at his church, where he is a drummer and percussionist in the music ministry.

Website: www.4dash.com