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**Ben B. Schwartz & Sons looks to expand in the Toronto**

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By

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Now in its 116th year in business, [Ben B. Schwartz & Sons](#), Inc. has a reputation in the Detroit produce scene that is second to none.

Located on the Detroit, Michigan Produce Terminal, the company serves local and national chain stores, as well as foodservice providers. Its distribution network reaches most of the United States and into Canada, and in 2022, the company plans to do even more there.

“One of the biggest target areas for us in 2022 is the Toronto market,” said Bill Loupée, chief operating office of Ben B. Schwartz & Sons. “We feel we haven’t fully serviced it to its maximum potential yet, so a lot of the same processes that we use for retailers in the U.S., we’re trying to leverage in Canada.”

The COVID-19 restrictions in Canada, which are more strictly enforced than in the U.S., has made that push something of a challenge.

“That’s caused problems for a bunch of our current Canadian customers,” Loupée said. “The customers we sell to in Ontario today are foodservice customers that were heavily impacted by the Canadian government shutting down indoor dining, and also wholesale distributors similar to us, whose business was down in a much more impactful way as a direct result of the enforcement.”

Interestingly, the company ended up with a huge disparity in freight rates between the U.S., and Canada. For example, Loupée explained that if you needed a truck to go from Washington to Michigan, a truck that might cost \$15,000 might be had for \$8,000 to go to Windsor. That created a big gap in market pricing between the U.S. and Canadian markets.

Ben B. Schwartz & Sons has recently hired Nick Duncan as an outside sales manager to oversee the Toronto expansion and also use some of his foodservice experience to help Ben B. Schwartz & Sons further penetrate markets in the Midwest.

“He’s working on expanding the Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and Louisville markets,” Loupée said. “We’re noticing somewhat interestingly that no retailers are pushing that hard into the Midwest, but they’re creeping that direction.”

For instance, Publix is expanding northward and Hy-Vee is expanding towards the east, while Wegmans is expanding towards the south and west, so Ben B. Schwartz & Sons feels they are

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closing in, so they are keeping an eye on those with hopes they can serve them the same way they service their national retail customers today.

Logistics is causing a huge challenge for the industry and its impact on Ben B. Schwartz & Sons is no exception.

“Supply chain disruptions is the big buzz in almost every field right now,” Loupée said. “The freight rates and the inability to get a truck in some areas is a challenge. For us, it’s actually a good thing, because Ben B is built to be very strong in short supply. We’re well versed in not only logistics but procuring product when it’s very difficult when product is short.”

So, when there’s a shortage of a particular commodity, such as grapes in early January 2022, the company is able to capitalize on the opportunity.

“It’s been strenuous to say the least to keep up with the demand, but we’re built for this,” Loupée said. “We have the right people in the right positions.”

Elsewhere around the company, Ben B. Schwartz & Sons was able to get some grant money from the federal government to implement the first electric terminal truck.

“What we do is a lot about sustainability to begin with and so I think it’s strongly aligned with our company mission,” Loupée said. “We’re excited that the truck is now deployed at the Detroit Terminal doing daily yard moves, and on off shifts it charges up just like a Tesla in someone’s garage. The next step will be making local deliveries with an electric truck and someday we’ll be talking about semis with electric.”

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