



NUCLEUS
RESEARCH

Guidebook: Assessing the value of DAT for shippers

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Executive Summary

DAT Freight & Analytics is a U.S.-based software vendor specializing in freight marketplace and data analytics solutions. The vendor provides digital tools that connect carriers, brokers, and shippers to improve load matching, rate benchmarking, and transportation decision-making. Its core offerings include DAT iQ, a transportation analytics suite, and DAT One, North America's largest on-demand freight marketplace. Together, these solutions give users visibility into real-time market rates, capacity, and lane performance across North America.

DAT iQ provides advanced transportation analytics that allow organizations to benchmark performance, monitor pricing trends, and forecast freight rates. Through tools like RateView and Benchmark from DAT iQ give users insights into spot and contract rates, national pricing averages, and supply-demand trends across van, reefer, and flatbed equipment types. Additional modes supported include ocean, LTL, and intermodal. These capabilities help shippers save time, evaluate carrier performance, plan budgets, automate and optimize procurement strategies, and manage routing guides more effectively.

DAT One supports daily freight operations by enabling shippers and carriers to identify optimal loads, while brokers can track and coordinate shipments through connected systems, ensuring all parties make data-driven pricing and routing decisions. The platform integrates capabilities such as load searching and posting, market condition tracking, mileage tools, factoring, and freight tracking. Within the DAT Load Board, carriers and brokers can access average lane rates, spot rate data, and market condition indices, helping them assess opportunities and maintain service reliability. Additional services include its Carrier Management Suite, freight factoring, and tracking solutions.

This report focuses on the value shippers realize from implementing DAT. Drawing from end-user interviews, the analysis highlights how shippers leverage DAT's analytics tools to improve transportation planning, enhance rate negotiations, and strengthen freight procurement strategies through data-backed market intelligence.

Summarized Benefits

The following benefits represent those most commonly experienced by the organizations analyzed in this DAT report and comprise the largest share of returns:

Shippers use DAT to validate contract and spot rates, strengthen sourcing decisions, and reduce exposure to volatile freight markets.

DAT gives shippers a single source of truth for market rates and lane performance across North America.

Cost savings and freight spend reduction

Through end-user conversations, Nucleus found that the most consistent benefit organizations realize from deploying DAT is measurable cost savings and improved control over transportation spend. DAT's benchmarking tools give shippers a clear view of what similar organizations are paying across lanes and modes, which allows procurement teams to challenge incumbent rates, rebalance routing guides, adjust the mix between internal assets and external carriers, and negotiate contracts with objective market data. Across interviews, shippers reported that this visibility typically translates to five to 15 percent cost savings during annual and mid-cycle sourcing events, with larger networks often realizing even greater impact depending on freight volume. Beyond aggregate savings, organizations noted that DAT supports more targeted decisions at the lane level. One organization Nucleus interviewed maintained five to six percent below-market pricing by continuously comparing their rates against DAT benchmarks, while others identified individual lanes where corrections produced double-digit percentage savings. These adjustments help organizations avoid overpaying in volatile markets and give procurement teams consistent leverage in discussions with carriers, brokers, and suppliers.

In addition to direct rate benchmarking, Nucleus found that organizations realized savings through multiple, sometimes overlooked levers enabled by DAT data. Several shippers benchmarked customer-pickup discounts to validate whether supplier-embedded freight rates were aligned with market norms, preventing inflated charges on inbound freight. Others optimized private fleet utilization by comparing internal hauling costs against DAT benchmarks to determine when routing loads on owned assets was more cost-effective than outsourcing. Some customers integrated DAT data directly into internal BI dashboards or third-party orchestration tools such as GoodShip to accelerate investigation of lane anomalies and automate routing decisions. Additionally, shippers participating in DAT's round-table surveys used peer insight to benchmark freight policies, identify negotiation positions, and validate procurement strategies. A smaller group extended DAT's rate intelligence into long-range network initiatives, using lane-cost visibility to inform decisions around where to position future plants or distribution centers.

Enhanced network design and optimization

Nucleus found that organizations are increasingly using DAT rate, density, and directional market data to inform capital investment and

Through end-user conversations, Nucleus found that DAT consistently helps shippers achieve 5-15% cost savings during sourcing cycles.

One manufacturing organization expanded its savings strategy by benchmarking customer-pickup discounts through DAT, allowing procurement teams to verify whether embedded freight charges were justified and avoid inflated supplier pass-through costs.

network design decisions. By understanding market rate variances, backhaul dynamics, and regional capacity availability, shippers can identify optimal locations for new plants, cross-docks, and distribution centers. DAT data also supports customer pick-up (CPU) program design, helping organizations quantify the value of shifting freight responsibility to vendors and benchmarking CPU discounts against market norms. Several interviewees noted that internal teams rely on DAT inputs when evaluating the total landed cost of new facilities or when determining whether private fleets should be positioned in specific regions. These insights extend DAT's value beyond transportation procurement by influencing long-term supply chain footprint decisions and improving the cost-to-serve across the network.

Improved cross-departmental collaboration

Nucleus found that DAT improves cross-functional collaboration by giving all stakeholders a shared, objective reference point for freight performance and market conditions. Before DAT, many organizations described fragmented conversations between logistics, procurement, finance, and operations, often driven by internal spreadsheets or carrier-provided data that could not be verified externally. DAT's benchmarking and forecasting tools give teams a consistent baseline for discussing rate health, budget expectations, supplier performance, and sourcing strategy. With transparent market data, logistics teams can justify rate decisions to finance, procurement can validate supplier proposals, and operations can understand whether changes in cost are market-driven or network-driven. Several organizations reported smoother alignment in budgeting cycles, clearer communication during RFP events, and fewer internal disputes once DAT became the standard reference for rate and market insight. This shared analytics foundation strengthened trust across departments and supported faster decision-making, especially during periods of price volatility or capacity disruption.

Increased risk mitigation

A recurring theme across interviews is the role DAT plays in helping shippers manage volatility and reduce exposure to rapid market swings. Shippers described that, prior to DAT, they lacked the external intelligence needed to anticipate rate shifts or validate whether carrier increases were justified. DAT's forecasting tools, peer benchmarking, and historical rate trends help organizations identify when markets are tightening or loosening, allowing them to adjust contract strategies, rebalance asset use, or time negotiations more effectively. Customers noted that DAT's visibility into market direction supports mid-cycle rate

Several organizations noted that DAT's directional rate data and regional capacity insights now influence long-term network strategy discussions.

DAT gives logistics, finance, operations, and procurement a shared reference point for freight conversations.

checks, volume alignment reviews, and early identification of lanes at risk of cost escalation. This helps organizations hedge against unexpected spikes, negotiate flexible contract structures, and avoid overpaying during downturns. Some shippers reported using DAT to renegotiate contract terms mid-year to reflect declining markets, while others used it to protect themselves from overexposure when markets tightened. Across the interviews, organizations consistently pointed to DAT as the key tool that allows them to shift from reactive freight management to proactive risk mitigation.

DAT helps shippers anticipate rate shifts and reduce exposure to volatility through forecasting and historical trend analysis.

Customer Profiles

For the development of this Guidebook, Nucleus interviewed several DAT customers across different industries to identify the challenges they faced before deploying DAT, understand the implementation process, and examine the benefits of the deployment.

Consumer Goods Manufacturer

A leading consumer goods manufacturer manages finished goods distribution across North America. The organization's operations oversee shipments from manufacturing facilities to forward-facing distribution centers that supply retail partners. From a procurement standpoint, the organization uses DAT Freight & Analytics primarily for market intelligence, leveraging lane-level and aggregate pricing data to benchmark transportation costs and ensure alignment with prevailing market rates. DAT's coverage is focused on North American freight activity, which the organization supplements for its Canadian network through internal data and third-party inputs.

A consumer goods manufacturer relied on DAT as its primary external market reference for annual budgeting and lane-level strategy, reducing internal disputes and creating a standardized baseline for transportation pricing.

The organization previously used Chainalytics for freight visibility. But once that platform was acquired by DAT, it has seen the platform evolve from basic rate visibility to a more analytics-driven approach. One of its early challenges was limited visibility into market pricing, particularly across U.S. truckload and intermodal lanes. Stakeholders needed reliable external data to support annual budgeting and freight procurement decisions.

DAT serves as the organization's primary source of external freight market data for both truckload and intermodal modes. From a procurement perspective, other benchmarking tools such as SONAR by FreightWaves are reviewed periodically, but DAT remains the preferred platform due to its depth of market data and historical benchmarking capabilities. The solution was adopted at a corporate level rather than

through an individual decision process. The organization takes advantage of the periodic updates on the DAT platform.

DAT's pricing intelligence supports both outbound finished goods distribution and inbound supplier-managed freight. For inbound flows, procurement teams use DAT data to evaluate whether supplier-embedded freight costs are aligned with market rates. By referencing DAT rate data and customer pick-up discount data during contract negotiations, procurement teams have achieved up to 10 percent savings on certain long-term supplier agreements. More broadly, DAT has become the organization's standard reference for transportation pricing, creating transparency between internal teams and external partners. This shared data foundation reduces disputes over rates and strengthens negotiation leverage by grounding discussions in objective market data.

Manufacturing and Consumer Goods Organization

A global manufacturing organization with a strong European presence operates two major business divisions and manages three distinct supply chains across North America. The organization's operations include consumer brands, professional hair care, and adhesive technologies. Within its North American operations, the logistics procurement team manages both domestic and international transportation, oversees 3PL relationships, and handles business services such as fuel recovery. This team is responsible for all logistics contracts and the transportation sourcing strategy.

The organization initially deployed DAT's benchmarking solution and has since expanded to using broader market intelligence and analysis tools within the DAT iQ platform. The manufacturing organization reevaluated its analytics tools a few years ago and compared options such as SONAR by FreightWaves, Uber Freight, Breakthrough Fuel, TruckStop, and several other providers. DAT was ultimately retained due to its long-standing credibility with shippers, brokers, and carriers, its ease of use, and its strong recognition in procurement workflows. The team also valued DAT's ongoing product development and its alignment with the organization's long-term digital roadmap for logistics data and decision support.

DAT has become an integral part of the organization's procurement strategy. Using DAT's benchmarking and peer comparison capabilities, the logistics team developed a "gain-share, pain-share" model with carriers to structure 12-month freight contracts that include mid-year rate and volume reviews. This approach enables flexibility when market

A consumer goods manufacturer used DAT to benchmark both outbound and inbound freight, enabling procurement teams to challenge embedded supplier freight costs and achieve up to ten percent savings in contract negotiations.

One global manufacturing and consumer goods organization leveraged DAT's forecasting and capacity insights to improve budget accuracy and reduce volatility across seven transportation modes.

conditions shift, allowing both sides to hedge risks and apply clawbacks when rates decline. The team uses DAT data to support rate negotiations with carriers, combining market benchmarks, volume trends, and service insights. Over the past year, these efforts have helped the organization achieve approximately \$1.5M in cost avoidance. DAT's analytics also streamline the RFP process by providing market baselines during bid events and enabling target rate setting. Additionally, the forecasting tools help align budget planning with long-term rate expectations, improving predictability and reducing exposure to volatility.

Building Materials Manufacturer

A large vertically integrated manufacturer in the building materials industry operates more than 1,000 locations across North America. The organization produces and distributes a wide range of products, from bagged concrete to large-scale infrastructure materials, and serves retail, commercial, and government markets. Its freight commodities range from eight-pound retail products to seventy-ton industrial items shipped via vans, flatbeds, drop-decks, and other open-deck trailers. Following a major acquisition in early 2024, the organization doubled in size and significantly expanded its transportation footprint.

The organization first implemented DAT in 2016, shortly after forming a centralized transportation department in 2015. Before that point, transportation was managed independently at the business-unit level, creating limited visibility into carrier compliance and rate performance. With more than 4,000 in-house trucks and roughly 1,350 external carriers, leadership sought a unified way to vet carrier safety, validate insurance and FMCSA compliance, and monitor cost trends across lanes. The organization also deployed a TMS, McLeod, to store contracts and automate carrier validation. One business unit had already used DAT for rate benchmarking and tariff visibility, which was later expanded enterprise-wide to compare lane costs and identify overspending.

DAT was selected for its ability to provide lane-level visibility into transportation pricing and carrier compliance. The platform allowed the organization to compare internal and external carrier costs, determine when to utilize its own fleet versus third-party capacity, and identify potential savings opportunities. The integration with McLeod's TMS made it easy to deploy and manage across multiple facilities.

Because DAT operates in the cloud, deployment was straightforward. Change management across numerous sites was important to

A global manufacturing and consumer goods organization used DAT's peer comparison and benchmarking tools to structure flexible annual freight contracts, avoiding approximately \$1.5M in transportation costs.

A building materials manufacturer integrated DAT data into Power BI dashboards to investigate lane anomalies and monitor rate fluctuations across more than 1,000 North American locations.

deployment success, as sustained training through DAT support was key. The transportation department of fewer than 35 people oversees all operations for thousands of drivers and assets, making standardization critical. Ongoing training programs and internally developed Power BI dashboards using DAT rate data now help teams track lane-level costs, investigate anomalies, and understand rate fluctuations versus market indices.

The organization has achieved significant financial and operational gains since expanding DAT use. In 2020–2022, shifting its freight mix from 80 percent brokered capacity to 80 percent asset-based yielded approximately 29 percent savings in transportation spend, roughly \$129M from outside-carrier costs. DAT's data helped validate when internal hauling was more cost-effective than outsourcing and enabled procurement teams to ensure external carrier rates reflected true market conditions. Additionally, the platform supports ongoing carrier monitoring, helping the organization mitigate compliance and liability risks amid increasing exposure to nuclear verdicts in the logistics industry.

Consumer Packaged Goods Manufacturer

A leading consumer packaged goods manufacturer with more than a century of history operates multiple brands. Following a recent corporate restructuring, the organization now functions independently under a global confectionery group, maintaining established logistics operations across North America. The organization generates approximately \$3B in annual revenue and supplies products to major retailers such as Walmart and Publix, as well as a wide network of regional and foodservice customers. Its network spans plants and distribution centers across North America, designed to keep DCs close to key customers for efficient replenishment.

The organization has used DAT for over fifteen years, initially through prior corporate ownership and continuing post-acquisition. DAT serves as a core element of its freight management and market benchmarking program, providing visibility into rate health and competitive positioning across lanes. Before deploying DAT, the organization lacked the external data needed to validate carrier rates or identify inefficiencies across its network. Internal performance reviews depended heavily on historical data, which limited responsiveness to changing market conditions.

The organization uses DAT as its neutral source of truth for freight benchmarking, leveraging the RateView and Benchmark Analytics tools

A building materials manufacturer used DAT to rebalance its asset and broker mix, generating 29 percent transportation savings that totaled roughly \$129M.

One CPG manufacturer used DAT's benchmarking data to support RFP events and weekly operational reviews, improving alignment between logistics, procurement, and finance.

to compare internal freight spend against broader market trends. Shippers submit lane-level data through the DAT IQ platform to assess competitiveness and identify improvement opportunities. The organization values DAT's agnostic position in the market, unlike vendors such as Uber Freight or SONAR, which are perceived as biased toward their own networks. DAT's objectivity, data depth, and reputation across carriers and shippers were key reasons it was retained as the enterprise standard for freight analytics.

DAT has been fully embedded in the organization's logistics and procurement workflows for over five years. Data from DAT integrates with the organization's freight orchestration and visibility tool, GoodShip, through API connections. While GoodShip manages execution and visibility, DAT remains the central benchmarking authority for rate validation. The organization continues to expand internal usage through broader team access and visualization tools such as weekly heat maps and rate-performance dashboards.

DAT has provided measurable cost avoidance and procurement value. Over the past several years, the organization has identified more than \$1M in cost avoidance opportunities by aligning freight rates with market benchmarks and adjusting carrier allocations. DAT's lane-level insights enable teams to quickly identify lanes that deviate from market norms and make timely corrections. The benchmarking data also supports RFP events by providing upper- and lower-limit rate ranges and informs executive-level reporting through shipper pulse surveys and market scorecards.

Beyond rate analytics, DAT helps the logistics team strengthen cross-functional discussions between finance, procurement, and operations by grounding pricing decisions in transparent, data-driven intelligence. This visibility ensures network optimization decisions are based on objective market information rather than carrier-provided data.

Grocery Retailer

One of the largest grocery retailers in North America operates more than 2,500 stores, employing approximately 450,000 people. The organization manages a complex transportation network that spans inbound, outbound, and vendor-managed freight. Its logistics and procurement teams rely on data-driven insights to benchmark freight rates, guide sourcing strategies, and improve carrier negotiations.

Before adopting DAT, the organization lacked a formal freight benchmarking system. Its previous landscape provided limited freight

A consumer-packaged goods manufacturer used DAT to identify more than \$1M in cost-avoidance opportunities by correcting lanes that diverged from market benchmarks.

A consumer-packaged goods manufacturer integrated DAT into its freight orchestration platform, GoodShip, making DAT the authoritative benchmark for lane-level rate validation.

payment benchmarking with minimal usability or analytical depth. This created gaps in visibility that made it difficult to justify sourcing strategies to leadership, compare company-paid versus vendor-paid freight, and support carrier negotiations with objective data.

The organization began working with Chainalytics in 2013, submitting annual freight data for benchmarking. Chainalytics stood out at the time for its user-friendly interface and accessible market insights. After DAT acquired Freight Market Intelligence Consortium from Chainalytics, the organization continued using the platform due to system familiarity, smooth transition support, and DAT's credibility in the freight analytics space.

The initial rollout of Chainalytics took less than a month, with the later transition to DAT completed in a similar timeframe and with minimal downtime. Early technical issues with data submission were quickly resolved with DAT support. Over time, the organization shifted from annual to weekly data submissions, enabling more granular benchmarking.

DAT provides the organization with an essential foundation for freight rate benchmarking and performance justification. Using DAT data, the transportation team consistently maintains freight costs 5–6 percent below market averages across categories. The platform also supports internal reporting by quantifying transportation performance for leadership and providing visibility into the relative value of company-paid versus vendor-paid freight. Beyond financial outcomes, DAT has improved transparency into market trends, enhanced collaboration between procurement and logistics, and strengthened strategic sourcing alignment.

Lessons Learned

Through end-user conversations, Nucleus found several consistent practices that help organizations maximize value from DAT and similar freight benchmarking tools. The most effective teams treat DAT as a strategic input into annual budgeting and forecasting rather than a fixed prediction engine. They pair DAT's rate projections with internal knowledge of seasonal patterns and market volatility to create more realistic transportation budgets and sourcing strategies.

Strong governance is another recurring success factor. High-performing shippers set up a structured review cadence with DAT's account teams every four to six weeks to discuss market trends, new product

A national grocery retailer used DAT to maintain freight costs five to six percent below market averages through weekly benchmarking and lane-level variance reviews.

Nucleus found that the most effective shippers treat DAT as a strategic input into budgeting and forecasting rather than a fixed rate prediction tool.

functionality, and updates on the carrier and broker ecosystem. Outside of scheduled meetings, users who proactively engage with DAT representatives gain earlier visibility into rate shifts and platform enhancements.

Training emerged as a major differentiator in successful adoption. Companies that invest in structured onboarding, certification-style training content, and simple step-by-step process documentation accelerate adoption and reduce reliance on administrators. Effective change management typically starts with leadership understanding transportation cost drivers, then cascades through plants and transportation managers so each group understands how DAT supports decision-making.

Across industries, shippers emphasized three pillars for sustained value: visibility to cost and service, integration of benchmarking into freight payment reviews, and alignment with broader compliance and sustainability objectives. Organizations that pair DAT's data pool with proactive vendor communication and cross-functional collaboration drive the highest ROI.

Successful deployments and faster time to value stem from organizations leveraging DAT support teams for advice on best practices and on-demand videos for efficiency in learning the platform.