Claims

1. A computer-implemented method under control of one or more computing devices configured with specific computer-executable instructions, the method comprising:

receiving a request from a first user of a group of users for an empty export container;

notifying the group of users of the request;

receiving an offer from a second user of the group of users to match the request by exchanging an empty import container owned or leased by a shipping line;

notifying the first user of the offer;

if the offer is accepted by the first user, determining if the empty import container is approved by the shipping line to be exchanged as the empty export container; and

if the empty import container is approved, notifying the first and second users to exchange the empty import container as the empty export container.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the group of users comprises a plurality of different transport companies.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the request comprises information relating to requestor, shipping line, container size, container type, container grade, commodity, export release number, pick-up/drop-off location, cut-off date/time, and combinations thereof.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the offer comprises information relating to exchange type (drop-off or pick-up), drop-off or pick-up location, cut-off date/time, container number, offeror, container size, container type, container grade, commodity, export release number, and combinations thereof.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising receiving confirmation from the first and second users that exchange of the empty import container as the empty export container has been completed.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of determining if the empty import container is approved to be exchanged as the empty export container comprises comparing the empty import container with a database of containers pre-approved for exchange by the shipping line.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the database of containers pre-approved for exchange by the shipping line is generated by electronic data interchange (EDI) with the shipping line.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of determining if the empty import container is approved to be exchanged as the empty export container comprises requesting and receiving approval from the shipping line for the empty import container to be exchanged as the empty export container.

9. The method of claim 1, further comprising generating a dashboard user interface that enables an individual user of the group of users to view, filter and manage a plurality of information relating to a plurality of empty import containers available for exchange as empty export containers among the group of users.

10. The method of claim 1, further comprising recommending matches between empty import containers and empty export containers available to be exchanged between individual users of the group of users, wherein the recommended matches are based at least in part on:

type of container;
location of container;
required delivery date;
distance between exchange locations;
access time at location of container;
type of transport vehicle; and
estimated time of arrival of transport vehicle at location of container.

11. The method of claim 10, further comprising notifying individual users of the group of users of the recommended matches.

12. The method of claim 1, further comprising predicting matches between empty import containers and empty export containers to be exchanged between individual users of the group of users, wherein the predicted matches are based at least in part on historical data relating to surpluses and shortfalls of empty import containers and empty export containers by the individual users of the group of users.

13. A system, comprising: one or more non-transitory computer readable storage media;
one or more processors; and

one or more program modules stored in the one or more non-transitory computer readable storage media and executed by the one or more processors to:

receive a request from a first user of a group of users for an empty export container;

notify the group of users of the request;

receive an offer from a second user of the group of users to match the request by exchanging an empty import container owned or leased by a shipping line;

notify the first user of the offer;

if the offer is accepted by the first user, determine if the empty import container is approved by the shipping line to be exchanged as the empty export container; and

if the empty import container is approved, notify the first and second users to exchange the empty import container as the empty export container.

14. A non-transitory computer-readable medium storing specific computer-executable instructions that, when operated by a processor, perform operations comprising:

receiving a request from a first user of a group of users for an empty export container;

notifying the group of users of the request;

receiving an offer from a second user of the group of users to match the request by exchanging an empty import container owned or leased by a shipping line;

notifying the first user of the offer;

if the offer is accepted by the first user, determining if the empty import container is approved by the shipping line to be exchanged as the empty export container; and

if the empty import container is approved, notifying the first and second users to exchange the empty import container as the empty export container.