

## The Competition

“There are reasons the moving and storage industry was regulated in the first place,” explained Jorja Coulter, vice president of customer experience and quality for National Van Lines Inc. in Broadview, Ill. “Many of those reasons still are extremely valid.

“At its very core, you’re taking everything that someone owns and putting it in a vehicle and locking the doors and driving away,” she added. “If there isn’t credibility and there isn’t insurance to back all of that up, this could be something that gets dumped along the highway.”

But to unregulated rogue operators, moving and storage is catnip, and today’s technology empowers them like never before. Moving apps are appearing that act like ride-sharing services, pairing consumers with operators that have signed up to accept moving jobs. Many of the operators offer partial services—such as transport only—even if they are nothing more than someone with a pickup truck looking for some extra cash.

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“They offer service at predatory prices that legitimate companies couldn’t afford due to things like workers’ comp insurance, liability insurance and payroll costs,” McLaughlin said. “The legitimate movers have overhead that prevents them from being able to offer service at that price, and that’s what these folks are counting on.”

The moving apps bank on today’s consumers, who expect instant service at the tap of a smartphone. That mindset can leave a string of unhappy customers in its wake, due to the possible complications:

- Operators might not be background-checked, enabling unsavory characters to walk in and out of homes and around families. And without valid identification, they might not be able gain access to locations such as military bases.
- The lack of workers’ compensation and insurance puts liability on the backs of customers.
- Unlike trusted services such as Angie’s List, the apps lack third-party vetting of reviewers.

Trustworthy vetting “makes sure that the reviewer is really a customer and not the plumber’s wife,” said Coulter. Such models are “very good, but they’re only as good as the vendors who sign up for the service.”