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FEBRUARY 2023

Record breaking return!



Over 3,500 WCAworld members gather at the world's largest ever meeting of freight forwarders

AFTER a four-year hiatus caused by Covid travel restrictions, the WCA Worldwide Conference opened in Singapore on Saturday by welcoming the largest ever number of freight forwarding companies to gather at one location.

The buzz and excitement in the ballroom at the opening cocktail demonstrated that nothing can replace the value of face-to-face meetings. Old friendships were reignited, new acquaintances made and business opportunities examined among a sea of smiling faces from 171 countries.

Despite the party continuing long into the night, the following

morning saw delegates gather for a very well attended session highlighting the suite of benefits available to members of WCAworld networks. This was followed by the main plenary session, which was opened by Chairman, David Yokeum, thanking the delegates for their support that has allowed WCAworld to become the prominent logistics network in the world since its foundation 25 years ago.

Delegates also learned of the vital and impressive work undertaken by the WCAworld Foundation, in conjunction with members. This included major aid

and humanitarian relief operations in Ukraine, Pakistan and now Turkey – following the recent devastating earthquake.

Mr Yokeum also made a promise that he would personally match any donations made to the charity by members during this conference week.

Other important topics discussed included a new 'Eco' programme for members in partnership with Pledge. Highlighting the growing need for accurate carbon emissions tools

and reporting and the need to comply with growing regulations, the Eco programme is set to become an important feature for members going forwards.

Chief Executive Officer, Dan March, spent time discussing the hot topic of digitalisation in the industry and offered a number of programmes, solutions and strategies that members could consider.

In the same theme, WCAworld announced two new tech products

under the FreightOscope brand.

FreightOscope comprises a rates platform, designed specifically for SME forwarders to handle their air and ocean rates in a seamless and automated way. Additionally, FreightOscope Freight Management System is a cloud-based TMS designed to meet the modern and future requirements of independent freight forwarders.

The first full day ended on a high with the lavish awards dinner (see page 6-7).

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Exploring Singapore

DELEGATES enjoyed a tour of Singapore with a highlight being Gardens by the Bay, which included the new Avatar Experience and Supertree Grove, the Flower Dome and Cloud Forest Conservatories, followed by a visit to Chinese Tea Appreciation. Other tours also included a team building 'Jewel Heist' and 'Chinatown Murders'.



Good to see you again!

THOUSANDS of smiling faces radiated around the ballroom as the WCA Worldwide Conference kicked off with the traditional cocktail reception. It was a delight to see so many old friends and meet a whole range of members attending the event for the first time. The many sponsors, that make the event possible, were also honoured on stage.



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Strong partnerships with strong agents are key for a 'newbie'

"ATTEND the WCA Conference," president of Worldwide Logistics Partners, Mitch Kamdar tells Voice of the Independent (VOTI) when asked what advice he would give to new forwarders entering the market. Kamdar, whose company began as a six-person operation back in 2002, knows something about growing a forwarding operation from scratch. In the intervening 21 years, Worldwide has grown to a 35-plus staff, multi-office operation with a focus on a diverse clientele.

"All new forwarders must take the opportunity and attend both the WCA's conference and, importantly, its plenary sessions," Kamdar continues. "WCA has so much to offer the small and medium-sized forwarder and most people can miss out on these offerings if they do not attend the plenary sessions – and maybe throw in the cocktails, tours and other social elements as reasons to be there. Always remember, it is the strong partnerships that come from working with WCA partners that provide the edge that allows you to compete with the big

multinationals. The personal touch, with global capability, is how you compete with them. Multinationals fail in this and the SME customers know it."

Kamdar's promotion of the network comes from experience. And, given the amount of time Worldwide has been operating, he and the team have developed a strong understanding of how to deal with market volatility. An unfortunately pertinent point, given the present stresses and strains experienced in the market. Kamdar warns that new forwarders entering the sector need to be aware of this, "and need to be more careful"

than perhaps has been normal in recent years. But those years were undeniably positive for Worldwide.

"Over the past few years, we had very positive performances – these recent years have been very good to all of us," he says. "With a sustained period of strong margins, we ended up taking on a lot of responsibilities that ultimately served as value-added services that came with a cost. Now, with the uncertainty, we are

thinking we may have to inspect these services and perhaps move towards a model of monetising them."

This is another word of advice he gives to prospective new forwarders: consider where you are, or where you can add value to your customers. While SME forwarders differentiate themselves from the multinational operators on their capacity to develop strong relationships with their customers, no customer expects their forwarder to operate as a charity. For this reason, Kamdar emphasises again the need for new forwarders to "be more careful" with the way they run businesses: "the present state of play is that the market is on something of a downward trend, with low freight rates and the associated cash flow issues", and forwarders need to bear this in mind, he says.

Those that can endure the difficult times tend to endear themselves to their customers, this is how they gain a reputation that makes them a valued member of the forwarding community. What then does Kamdar see as the endgame, to sell out to a larger rival or find ways to grow the business? Kamdar does not believe there is a right or wrong to this, stressing that if a good offer is on the table, "why not" take the deal? That being said, for those that want to grow their business organically, he believes there is only one way to make a success of this, bringing him



MITCH KAMDAR
Worldwide Logistic Partners

back to his opening point: "partners".

"If the plan is to grow the business, then the new forwarder really needs to be capable of developing strong partnerships with strong agents, so that they can offer a multitude of services to their clients," he says.

"But to survive as a forwarder these days is not to just provide a transportation solution, it is to provide a total solution, one going beyond what we would see as traditional logistics services. It is about sitting in front of the customer and saying 'what is not working well for you? What is making your day harder? What keeps you from getting out of the office at the end of the day? Getting answers to these questions opens the door for business opportunities. Resolving these issues makes the customer a 'relationship' that could even become an 'advocate.'"

Possibilities, potential and opportunity the guiding lights for R&S

R&S Shipping started with a late-noughties vision to build a logistics company offering the Salvadoran and Central American markets what the company's coordinator of sales and operations, Ana Luz Castellanos, tells Voice of the Independent could be seen as "real solutions" to the hurdles of doing business in the region.

"We wanted to form a team committed to the values we intended to instil in the company and a team that put our clients' needs first," says Castellanos.

Within a few years, R&S had hitched itself to the WCA's "prestigious agents' network" and Castellanos says the decision was well-placed, with both the network and R&S recognising similar attributes in one another.

"We decided to join in 2015," she continues. "And since then, our growth has been exponential, and for this we thank all of our colleagues in the network who have trusted in our work and dedication for many years. Now we are part of the WCA Pharma Academy Network, where we can count on qualified and trained agents to operate to the highest standards within the healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors. It is now time to grow even more, and that is why last year we joined the relocation team, to find a market with special needs we can also serve."

The relocation team specialises in addressing the needs of businesses, embassies and diplomats that are moving to a new destination. For R&S, the decision to join was simple, Castellanos noting that the "specialised market created new opportunities to handle more shipments". Further growth has seen the expansion of R&S's global footprint, with operations outside its historic, domestic borders.

"We recently opened a new company in the United States, it is legally established in Miami, Florida," Castellanos says. "This will bring better opportunities, and it will allow us to hire at least 10 additional employees and to operate our own warehouse. The company is ready, and operations will begin during the second half of 2023."

But the company's home state remains its priority and, in the years since its founding, R&S and Salvador have grown in prosperity. During the third quarter of 2022, the Salvadoran economy reported a growth rate exceeding two percent, and the projections suggest that this increase will be sustained throughout the course of 2023. Furthermore, the country has seen a reduction in the violence that many associated it with over recent decades.

"The country's violence index has significantly decreased, which has allowed investors to take an interest in the country again," Castellanos adds. "The US dollar is used as the currency, which allows for a stable economy. In 2021, the bitcoin was adopted as legal tender, however, its use is irrelevant to the general economy, but it might present possibilities in the future."

This sense of new possibilities was something inherent to the origin of R&S, and it seems possibilities, potential and opportunity will be the company's guiding light. But Castellanos believes the role of WCA has been essential.

"Our sincerest thanks to all the WCA staff, and we join the celebration of the network's 25 years of logistics partnering," she concludes.

John Ford wins hall of fame award

WCAWORLD was delighted to announce John Ford as the latest recipient of the WCA Hall of Fame award.

As President of CaribEx Worldwide (that later became CBX Global), the company joined the network in 2002 and John quickly became one of WCA's biggest advocates and supporters.

His input was vital in helping the development of many of the benefits members enjoy today and he still plays an important role in the dispute process run by the network.

John has attended almost every conference held over the past 21 years and spends his own time helping new members find their way to success. Thank you John for your many years of support and friendship.






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 Stephan Haltmayer (CEO)	 Reto Gross (CH)	 Nico Haltmayer (DE)	 Oliver Krautter (DE)
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 Andrzej Banasiuk (PL)	 Alina Moldovan (RO)	 Lubos Lukac (SK)	 Richard Arnold (UK)

Optimism – part and parcel of the ethos at JTM

IT is set to be a year of expansion for JTM Group. Alongside finishing construction of the final phase of what will be its new headquarters at Porto Airport, the forwarder has also acquired its own office space in Lisbon. Founder Joao Val tells Voice of the Independent (VOTI) that the growth, coming in the midst of concerns over global economic collapse, is warranted.

"Even though there are always rumours of constraints in the economy, and the persistent issues that arise from global issues, we have always been very positive," Val says. "For the beginning of 2023 we are on the same path as 2022, with the hope to go even beyond. And of course, WCA being

the biggest network worldwide and the one in which we really do invest a lot, we surely will benefit from it. So, we expect things to continue going well and that we will maintain our growth."

Such optimism appears part and parcel of the ethos of Val and his business partner, Carlos Magalhaes, who founded the company in 2011. It is an optimism that has seen the company expand its footprint outside its home market, with a significant investment in neighbouring Spain – where it has put a lot of money not only into plans to open a new branch office within the next 11 months, but also towards human resources. Val and the team believe, despite its strong presence in Spain, there is "still room to grow" – a view Val also holds when it comes to Portugal – "there's still room to grow".

For Europe more widely, Val has some words of caution. It is difficult to deny the impact of the conflict in Ukraine. "Europe," he adds, "is still close to a war zone" – and that is not forgetting the fact that inflation continues to cause concerns for many across the continent. Nonetheless, as a forwarder, Val believes there is opportunity to be had in stabilising the areas in which the company is present, as well as "thinking outside of the box" when it comes to potential business opportunities.

Indeed, JTM's focus has also been "pretty much" towards the continuing

development of business between its own offices and its main partners in Africa, central and south Asia, South America and the expansion of US operations, adding as it has a new branch in New York, a move that is intended

to complement its facilities in Florida.

"On top of Miami and Jacksonville, having JTM USA as an own licensed customs broker will be a big boost for us," continues Val. "At JTM, we are, of course, hoping to see growth over the entire US market – and we can

cover the entire country too – however, for us, we still see it as a benefit to open branch offices in strategic cities."

In concert with growing its operational footprint, Val

"we expect things to continue going well and that we will maintain our growth"



CARLOS MAGALHAES & JOAO VAL
JTM Group

says the company has also sought to address another footprint – one that plays on the minds of an ever-increasing number of its customers. Namely, its environmental footprint.

"We have defined a policy of setting the company with social responsibility at the highest level, in terms of carbon dioxide emissions, and therefore we are in the process of being certified as green logistics company," Val continues. "Over the past year, for instance, we have sponsored AF/KLM Cargo's new sustainability programme (SAF) and we intend to continue this over coming years with even more airlines."

As such, it seems the JTM team will touch down in Singapore with a lot to share with the WCA family. And for Val, the conference could not come sooner.

"We have been part of the WCA family for many years, always with the goal of growing and increasing our presence," he says. "This is the reason why we invest mostly in this huge network, the biggest one in the world. And, obviously, after years without having the big event physically face to face, everyone needs to meet, to develop new business and as well as, to strengthen their partnerships with other colleagues overseas. This is our main goal."

WCA membership helps us face the challenges of the post-Covid era

CHIEF executive of Translog Overseas Spain Justo Marmol gives a sense of how things have changed in the forwarding sector since the dawn of this century. Fifteen years ago, he tells Voice of the Independent, it was possible for a forwarder to go it alone and be "very strong" in their country.

"Today, that is impossible," declares Marmol. "Everything has changed. Even the way of doing business between the seller and the buyer has changed. It was the case, at the start of the century, that the forwarder's client was selling FOB or CIF, and it was here that the business finished. Now, though, even the CIF traffic requires support at the other end of the movement, whether that is exporting or importing. Regular business in the forwarding sector must be end-to-end now if you wish to keep the client long-term."

Given that Translog is a Spanish company with operations in many of the countries in which its clients want service, it has become reliant on its partners, and this is where a network like WCA comes in.

"For most of the business we close in Spain we are going to need a partner at the other end of the shipping route," Marmol says. "Networking today is not basic, it is essential and more important than most people realise, or even stop to think about. But that works

both ways; just as we need a partner, there are forwarders, partners, who need a partner in Spain."

Translog's long-standing success in Spain is down to its dedication to

the market. Marmol says this is necessary to ensure it attracts those partners that can then assist Translog with its overseas operations. That domestic dedication drives its continual efforts to expand and improve the offering it has. Indeed, in the past three years it has opened two new offices in its home market, while expanding its actual logistics footprint with the addition of one logistics warehouse while it has also bought two more that it is currently in process of getting licensed to add further substantive capacity.

"These two new warehouses will be coming online soon," Marmol says. "Meanwhile, in the not-to-distant future Translog Spain will be opening more offices inside our home country, not to mention buying more warehouses – we are keen to own rather than just lease our own facilities – and added to this, we are working on the development and opening of our first office in another country [although Marmol won't be drawn on where this is]."

This dedication to growth has no doubt been spurred by what have been "two excellent years" for the industry. But Marmol is in no doubt that it is an industry now facing up to challenges that include inflation, possible recession and conflicts across Africa and Europe, with geopolitical instability in other areas of the world.

"What helps all of us, though, is being a member of WCA," Marmol adds. "Being a member of WCA will help against what the world is facing. And this puts members in a much better position than others. And for those that are not affected, or less affected, WCA will help you to grow in a way that means not just short-term, but long-term, growth. At the end of it, the management of the network is from companies that are WCA companies, and that means there is a desire to challenge and to not only maintain profits but to increase them."



JUSTO MARMOL
Translog Overseas Spain

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AFRICA: Mahmoud Kassem of Vertex Express picks up the award for Africa

WCAworld **best partner**



WINNER: DC Logistics - Ivo Mafra collects the top agent of the year award

WCA Best Partner Awards 2022		
Region	Winner	Runners Up
Africa	Vertex Express	DN Freight
		1UP Cargo
Asia	Best Services International	Voltrans Logistics
		Everok Int
Europe	Unsworth UK Ltd	VECTOR S.P.A.
		Cargo Services S.A.
India Sub Continent	SLS Skyways Group	Dart Global
		Everfast Freight Forwarders
Latin America	DC Logistics	B&M Logistica
		ILS Cargo
Middle East	MRC Shipping	Abreco Freight
		EFS Logistics
North America	Interworld Freight	ClearFreight
		Radiant Global
TOP AGENT 2022	DC Logistics	SLS Skyways Group
		MRC Shipping



EUROPE: Richard Hogg collects the Europe award for Unsworth UK



LATIN AMERICA: Ivo Mafra from DC Logistics collects the award

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NORTH AMERICA: Interworld Freight's Farouk Gomati collects the award



INDIAN SUB CONTINENT: Rohit Sehgal and the team from SLS Skyways take home the prize



ASIA: Damini Wang of WCA collects the award on behalf of Best Services International



MIDDLE EAST: Mathew Chacko and Mirshad Moopen collect the award for MRC Shipping

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QCS set to toast a 50-year milestone

IT is not only WCA with something to celebrate: next year will see network member QCS toasting 50 years in the forwarding business.

Chief executive of the company and son of its founder Stephan Haltmayer tells Voice of the Independent QCS's 2024 celebrations follow half a century in which the company has contended with myriad problems. But, he says, overcoming adversity is part and parcel

of the forwarding profession.

"We have gone through many troubled waters in all these years, but we have never been as stable as we are today," Haltmayer says. "We are still a family-owned company that is now going into its third generation. WCA has helped us to have a close agent network around the world, and it is those great agents that have helped protect us and allowed us to reach this milestone – so a big part of our success is credited to

WCA."

Given next year's landmark, it is perhaps unsurprising that QCS has a lot planned in the build-up, Haltmayer noting that the company is going through a "massive change" as it looks to expand beyond just being a "German" operator to a European one. This development has been a long-term project, which included opening new offices in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia last year.

"Times have been very challenging with these new projects," he continues. "In only six months, we employed 28 new staff in these countries, with the offices now fully operational and already running at break-even. Luckily, we were able to find excellent staff that are hungry and eager to grow the new offices. I am proud to say, that we are already one hundred percent

QCS team attending the WCA Worldwide conference



operational in these new territories, with all licences in place."

Alongside its home market and those newly opened, QCS has a presence in Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK, bringing its European footprint to nine countries operated out of 27 offices. Haltmayer says that each of QCS's country managers will be in attendance at the WCA's Singapore conference, underscoring the company's determination to make Europe its home market. Furthermore, he says that the plan for the next 12 months is to also look into the possibilities of opening new offices in both Austria and the Czech Republic, a move that, if successful, would only further solidify QCS's "strength" in Europe.

"The market has been good for SMI companies like us," Haltmayer adds. "Rates and capacities lacked transparency in the past. But now we are in a position where the markets are

Caxton & WCA – A lasting partnership for PartnerPay

GLOBAL payments can be complicated, so having a trusted partner who is always available for you is crucial. For a large business, bespoke service is also crucial as there is no margin for error, or for working with a partner that can't accommodate your specific needs. That's why Caxton has become a trusted partner to WCAworld, helping PartnerPay flourish as a bespoke payments platform that flexes to meet your needs.

WCAworld is the largest and most powerful network of independent freight forwarders, and PartnerPay receives and transfers freight fees and other monies daily from its 10,000+ member offices across 193 countries. The business has long-partnered with Caxton to safely and securely facilitate this.

The outgoing payments team sits in London, and after successfully using Caxton for all outgoing payments in all currencies, the business wanted to offer the same convenience to global teams. Working collaboratively with WCA, Caxton created a bespoke interface to offer every payment on one platform.

Global freight continues to see increases in demand, and through the PartnerPay partnership, Caxton is able to assist WCA and its members with a powerful platform acting as a global digital wallet which takes all the guesswork out of international payments.

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levelling out. Most of the airlines and shipping lines have taken up their scheduled services again, and I am positive that the business will remain strong, even though there is some volatility in overall market conditions, instability being

generated by the high fuel charges, high inflation and the ongoing war in the Ukraine. My confidence in the market to rebuff these difficulties comes from the fact that we are still seeing very high demand in both airfreight and seafreight."

Diversity the key to riding out another Covid-style crisis

CAPACITY shortages, driver shortages, staff shortages, and "shotgun pricing" rendered the pandemic a particularly tough period for the international transport industry. For forwarders, however, there was a one saving grace – "we were an essential service" co-founder and co-chief executive of Journey Freight, Richard Thornton, tells Voice of the Independent. "So, while the rest of the world was confined by lockdowns, we were still able to function."

And there were areas in which the business saw undeniably positive changes: e-commerce being the big one. Indeed, Thornton is not alone in describing this sector as one of the major drivers of industry over that near-two-year spell. Demand from online consumers drove the logistics and transport sector to create a business model specifically designed to serve people in lockdown.

"Specific home delivery services were created to serve online shippers using the likes of Alibaba, Amazon and Walmart," Thornton says. "Our business in North America remained stable, and even though we battled with rising energy prices, we were still able to offer consistent services across all the different modes of transport with an increase in time-sensitive dedicated products."

As the world emerges from the pandemic and the lingering effects of Covid-19, companies have sought to diversify and ensure that, should a similarly crippling global event recur, they are better able to maintain something approaching consistency of operations. But also, to tackle a pending rebound in activity.

"Journey Freight has added staff in all our

offices to ensure we have sufficient resources to handle an upturn in business as the market returns to normal," Thornton continues. "In addition, we are also cross-training our teams to ensure all our employees are familiar with the work performed by others."

And what about the state of the markets after what Thornton describes as "shotgun-pricing from carriers" throughout the pandemic? There appears an undeniable consensus from both the forwarding sector and from shippers that carriers took advantage of the chaos of the past two years

– and their financials certainly show a healthy period, that has seen many of them on the acquisition path and branching out into new modes of transport. But as things presently stand, Thornton believes pricing levels have now stabilised. This does not mean, however, that forwarders are returning to a "business as usual" approach.

"It would appear carrier pricing has now stabilised," says Thornton. "But we have also

broadened our supplier base to ensure that we have competitive prices for all forms of service."

Furthermore, Journey Freight has plans to capitalise on the way its business changed over the Covid years.

"We will continue to invest and embrace new technology solutions that help our staff and clients," Thornton adds. "We believe opportunities still await in the time-sensitive side of our industry, particularly when it comes to heavyweight and temperature-controlled moves. Our project business has increased, and we have a dedicated team to handle outsized cargo by road, rail, air and sea."

"It would appear carrier pricing has now stabilised"

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The Mathez family is not for sale – we grow organically

"WE had two options: sell or appoint," president of Mathez Freight Frederic Mercier tells Voice of the Independent (VOTI). Mercier's comments

come as the company celebrates a year of success, following a restructuring process that saw it appoint a series of new managers with the aim of growing Mathez "organically".

"In an industry where mergers and acquisitions are the norm, the easy way, we decided that we wanted to take a different route," Mercier continues. "It was not the case that we had not

had offers, we had, and some of them came from WCA members. But to protect the identity and heritage – the reputation –

of Mathez, what a successful forwarding operation is based on, we baulked; we opted for organic growth and expanded the executive team. We are very pleased with the results, as they have demonstrated proof of trust in Mathez."

The decision of Mercier and the team was based largely on a belief in Mathez as a family company. "We respect our employees," he

"we opted for organic growth and expanded the executive team"

adds, noting that Mathez employs some 190 staff operating across 16 branches. All of these are in France, with Mercier stressing that the company, founded in 1950 – "talk about heritage" – is very much a French company. Delving further into the logic behind the rejection of offers, not to mention the pressure of friends – "we had friends pleading with us to sell" – he says that an assessment of what Mathez was showed that, like a family, it was not a single entity.

"Rather, we recognised that what we had was a series of small entities comprised of very skilled people," Mercier says. "These teams would be made up of maybe three to five people with a focus on niche areas

well outside the general cargo sphere. For instance, we had some people working in the art logistics arena, others worked in the exhibition department, others in yacht repair and refitting."

That last is particularly pertinent, as Mathez has built a name for itself in mega-yacht work. That aside, it became apparent to the company that having assembled teams of highly-skilled workers, it was "pretty hard" to mix, ensuring the company's continuity – at least in the form that had made it such a highly prized asset – with a takeover from what would have likely been, if not a multinational, then certainly an international company.

"We have been a success up to now because of the

way we have run our operation," Mercier adds. "It is a business controlled by a series of autonomous units that together make everything flow. We realised that were we to sell, this would not have been able to continue, not indefinitely, at least. An international company would not understand this model of operating, it would have wanted to take over control of the operations. And that brings us back to our heritage, and our pedigree. We respect our employees; we are a human company, and we are not in the business of selling them."

Does Mercier have any regrets on the decision? Judging by the year Mathez has had, it would not seem so. The company is in the midst of finishing



FREDERIC MERCIER
Mathez Freight

construction of a 1,000-square metre warehouse for the art department, no small feat, given art requires high levels of security, temperature control and controlled customs storage. And what else?

"People: we are pouring loads of investment into hiring more people to cope with the big development plans we have," he says. "All our business units are expanding, so, before we move into new areas, opening new branches, we need to consolidate a little bit."

Marinair looks to its 'friends' to help it expand and develop

GLOBAL supply chains are in the midst of an epoch of change. Russia's war on Ukraine is heightening tensions between East and West. Shippers are looking at the situation, asking themselves where they want to be.

Forwarders are realising this more rapidly than anyone else. It is, as



PAVLOS POUTOS
Marinair

Marinair's chief executive, Pavlos Poutos, tells Voice of the Independent (VOTI) that, in this era of "fast changing" markets, to keep up, forwarders need to not only "stay online" but be analytical enough to comprehend the "relevant needs" of the market in the moment. For Poutos, the most efficient way to achieve this is through technology.

"To support our clients with the best possible services available and solve problems that often occur between freight transportation, we keep evolving internal procedures by upgrading our logistics with Logitude's SaaS freight forwarding software," Poutos says. "Added to this, we will be installing our own online platform at the end of February, Marinair, or

myMCS. With this, we believe we will be able to cover all the needs of our customers and serve our partners and clients instantly. The aim of the new system is to be able to save time while concurrently increasing the sales of all the parties involved."

Poutos says that Marinair's ethos includes an openness towards studying and, where viable, expanding operations. But, he stresses, any efforts to grow the business need to be based on a clear understanding of not only the trade arena but the potential that it offers the company, and that which the company can offer.

"At this time, our focus is in prioritising the promotion of our digital tools and services," he says. "We are doing this while making these tools and

services available not only internally but also to our partners and our clients. As I said, we believe doing this offers the benefit of not only saving costs, but also of saving time, which serves as a benefit to the whole supply chain."

Marinair has had a busy few years, but it has recognised that judging the performance in the post-Covid era means comparing the year not with 2020 or 2021, but with 2019 and the year prior to the pandemic. The last 12 months have been a belter. While no one would dismiss the successes of a busy year, Poutos notes that

the stresses and strains of competing in such an environment have re-emphasised the key benefits of having a wide network of friends to call on for support.

"The demands of last year were significantly more than in 2019, Poutos says. "The main tradelanes, like Asia and Europe, were much more active than they had even been before. It is at times like these that being a member of an organisation like WCA really shows its benefits. Not only does it give you the tools to organise and develop your business, but it is also assisting in the development of new

products, new services and new collaborations. All of which help you to compete aggressively within such an active market."

Given this, Poutos says, he and the rest of the Marinair team are very much looking forward to the WCA conference or, as he calls it, "the Big Event".

"These big events of our industry are always opportunities for us to expand our brand more and, at the same time, get a better understanding of the market situation," Poutos adds. "Through this, we are better able to predict our next developments as an organisation. When you have new services and new tools to promote and share, attending any of the WCA Events is a good development step."

"we will be installing our own online platform at the end of February"



The game-changer – how to create a network in the logistics arena

"I checked into a Motel6 and started with the Zs," WCA founder David Yokeum tells Voice of the Independent (VOTI), as he discusses the origins of what would go on to be, by 2023, a 37-year relationship with Zarach & Associates' Edward Zarach. The meeting that followed that call fired the starting gun on the development of United Shipping, the network that Yokeum, Zarach and 10 others would form prior to the development of WCA. It was, as Zarach tells VOTI, a "game-changer".

"Prior to David, what we did as forwarders when it came to finding brokers in the US was use the Customs House Guide," says Zarach. "This was the only thing we had to find a broker. The same thing applied overseas, if we needed an agent, we'd go through a directory sending out a telex to anyone we could find. This was the only way to communicate without flying to the city."

Yokeum – described by

many as the founder of networks in the logistics sphere – says that the embryo of what would become United Shipping was founded, however, not in that call but in having observed the way his broker brothers frustratingly battled with this overly cumbersome, and unnecessarily distant, way of finding partners – "they weren't really partners, these were decisions made on blind trust," says Zarach.

"Yeah, I had the idea while living with my two brothers, who were brokers," says Yokeum. "Previously, I had been working for Gulf Western and it owned an automotive division. I was informed the company was being broken up and I was given the heads-up that I would be among the casualties. So, I'm with my brothers and they receive a call from one of their clients asking for a recommendation for a good broker in Houston. They provided a recommendation but didn't actually know the broker.

That was, as my brother said, the risk they had to take. Things came together. I was looking for a new future and realised there was an opportunity that would allow my brothers to actually know the forwarders they worked with, and vice versa. So, I picked up the Yellow Pages, Ed [Zarach] picked up the phone and we organised a meeting."

That initial meeting set out only the concept, specifically, bringing together a group of independently owned logistics companies. As Yokeum tells it, Zarach seemed to trust him and he felt he was someone he could work with so, he set up another meeting to tell Zarach that he wanted him to be the first member of the budding network. But, to make it work, he also told Zarach he needed \$1,500.

"I didn't know David [Yokeum] from Adam,"

Zarach says of those initial meetings. "He appeared one day. We had a conversation in my office. I didn't buy into it initially because I didn't know this guy. He called me later and said I think you're the guy I want. I have other prospects, so you need to make a decision. I didn't buy that, but I agreed to a second meeting. After some

cocktails I decided I liked this guy. I handed over the cheque and all I said was 'if this is a scam keep going, don't come back!'"

Yokeum remembers that response too:

"Yeah, Ed gave me this cheque, signed for \$1,500, with no name of any company. Blank. It was total trust. As Ed said, his only ask was that if this was a scam, he didn't want me coming back. After the \$1,500 Ed gave, what I would do was drive to a city and interview forwarders and brokers. First

New York, then Boston and so on."

Zarach says he gave Yokeum a bit of head start, in terms of who to see, recommending some logistics companies and agents he thought might have what it takes to join the network. After an exhaustive effort, criss-crossing the US by car, Yokeum had the group that would become United Shipping's founding 12 members. They met in Houston and discussed plans for expansion and who they would invite to join.

"We all had contacts overseas we'd worked with," Zarach continues. "We told David who they were and we said 'go check them out'. But one thing we agreed was that no one was getting in until David had interviewed them. After that, he would send them to the board, and we would decide whether or not to approve them."

It was up and running. Yokeum and Zarach realised they had changed things, even if the whole operation, as Yokeum says, "was

nothing to look at". But together they had created an exclusive group of logistics companies that could trust one another to ensure the job was done, and done well. It was a system built on one member per market. This, though, in some sense, was the seed of Yokeum and Zarach's disillusion with the original logistics network.

"What I started to realise was that it was difficult if you had an LA member with only interest in one market, say Asia," says Yokeum. "It was good, it was working, but it could be so much better. The board did not like my idea that it could be expanded. I was outvoted and removed as president of United Shipping."

For some, that could have been a gutting blow. For Yokeum, however, it seemed to free him. Yes, he had lost control of the network he had founded, but having proved the initial idea of "an association that would work together on an international basis", he had, as Zarach notes, "changed everything".

"I checked into a Motel6 and started with the Zs"

When two great minds come together, there's no limit to what can be accomplished.

It all started with a trusting partner, a vision, and a plan to lead the world in logistics partnering. Since the very beginning Edward Zarach & Associates believed in the potential of WCAworld and became the very first member in 1998, and since has been one of their major supporters. Great opportunities happen when the right people come together to solve a need; this is how WCAworld was created to provide world-class benefits to independent freight forwarders.

Through the years Edward Zarach and Associates has evolved into a fully integrated supply chain service provider and a leader in the industry providing consultative and transactional services to the global shipping community.



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Warehouse automation brings efficiency boost – and is cost-effective

"THERE'S a lot of talk about new technology, and sometimes it can be hype, but based on our experience, there are a lot of bright people out there with great ideas and innovations that truly change the world we live in," Günther Jocher, MD of Munich-headquartered forwarder Group7, tells Voice of the Independent.

Jocher is speaking on the eve of the WCA's 25th Worldwide Conference in Singapore, and off the back of opening Group7's latest state-of-the-art warehouse.

Based in Hamburg, the 26,000 square metre warehouse and 2,000 square metre office complex took some 18 months to develop and is expected to create at least 150 new jobs in the city. Perhaps just as important is the innovation it brings, innovations Jocher believes will become part and parcel of the logistics world.

"It really does bring a lot of new technology with it," he says. "Maybe the most important of which are the new inventory drones and four driverless vehicles that will operate throughout the warehouse. In addition, they require just one human operator, which



freed-up the workforce for tasks too complicated for machines."

The current plan is to stick with the four vehicles that have already been put into service, but Jocher said the make-up of the fleet is something Group7 will continually reassess and, if necessary, add to. But Group7 has a strong footprint in Germany, with nine transport branches dotted across the country, as well as four logistics facilities, including a new one in Hamburg, and sites in Munich, Frankfurt and Düsseldorf.

Alongside the autonomous vehicles, the inventory drones are expected to generate a major spike in efficiency. Typically, when inventories are taken, the whole warehouse is forced to suspend operations and, for a business dependent on time, this is an obvious negative. However, with the drones, inventory of specific aisles can be undertaken while the rest of the warehouse can continue operating.

"We'll have inventory being taken with pick-and-pack work continuing alongside the drones," continues Jocher. "These are great, as the whole operation does not need to be stopped for what was once a time-consuming, if essential, task. So, with the drones you get that efficiency boost, but after the initial outlay, they also become incredibly cost-effective."

All this would not have been possible without the partnerships Jocher and his team have formed over the years. Group7 has fostered relationships with a number of start-ups and its internal innovation team is tasked with continually hunting new ideas that could benefit the business.



GÜNTHER JOCHER
Group7

"We also coordinate closely with many universities," Jocher says. "And from this we have had some really great successes. For instance, we have developed a simulation system that allows us during the tender process to show potential clients how we would operate things for them. The system constructs the reality we would be looking to achieve and allows us to provide a more accurate calculation of the cost. It is something clients find incredibly impressive, and gives them that added assurance of what to expect."

But, can this new tech really change the underlying structures of how logistics is done?

"Oh yes," answers Jocher. "Our inventory drone I consider a small game-changer, but another thing we offer is 3D printing; and that's really big because we do a lot of spare parts work and 3D printers really are the future on this, because it means you don't need huge warehouses full of parts."

Everok: ready to take advantage of a regional turning point

1st January 2022 witnessed the entering into force of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) between China and 14 other Indo-Pacific countries. Intended to improve access and grow trade within the region, the agreement appears to have been welcomed within the forwarding community. Founder of Everok Group Billy Hu tells Voice of the Independent that enactment of the RCEP was something of a "turning point" for the region, with expectations that Asia would become markedly more competitive, going forward.

Hu's comments come as many discuss the possibility of firms moving away from China as concerns mount over increased instability on the geo-political front.

"Many manufacturers in China established their branches and factories in Asia," says Hu.



BILLY HU
Everok Group

"The future of business relocation away from China might be actual, but this change is an opportunity rather than a threat. Everok Group is a global forwarder founded in China, and we ship cargo from Asia to the world. Everok began the group's expansion eight years ago by establishing overseas branches in Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. All overseas branches are managed to the same standard and supported by digital supply chain technologies as local branches. Through eight years of growth, Everok's Asian extensions are on their way to helping thousands of business partners and customers expand their business scope and strengthen their global vision."

Hu may be optimistic, but he is by no means blind to the pending – or present, depending to whom you speak – turmoil the market finds itself in. He recognises that growth will not be at the rate seen in the years prior to the pandemic, nor that things will return to normal imminently; it is, he says, the case that any return to normality will "take time", but he does see crises as moments of opportunity, and it seems that Everok is very keen to capitalise on these opportunities.

"We at Everok do believe that the future of digital global forwarders is bright," he

continues.

That faith saw it develop its own digital supply chain platform, MyEverok. And since its launch, the company has expanded the system to offer a suite of new services, including online booking.

"We will invest more resources in digital supply chain platforms and offer our overseas agents and customers an accurate and

flexible supply chain experience to build 'the second growth curve'," Hu notes. "But we also perceive that there are future opportunities to be had from the new supply chain concept suggested by US and European governments."

This concept, he says, is premised on diversification of suppliers, paired with a mix of reshoring, near-shoring, and friend-shoring.

"Global buyers may have more choices in the future to purchase goods in other countries rather than China, and this change may lead to a continuous decline of overseas purchase orders in China, but it also gives the Chinese forwarding sector a brand new mission to assist their factories and brands to explore their overseas markets," Hu adds. "Everok Group is absolutely confident and well prepared to catch this trend."

"We at Everok do believe that the future of digital global forwarders is bright"

Networking the key to growth, says Kinay

"We strongly believe in the importance of networking for the growth of our business," main sponsor of the WCA Conference for 2023 Kinay Transport and Logistics (KTL) tells Voice of the Independent. For KTL this focus on dialogue, communication, and cooperation goes beyond conferences and the big industry events.

It is the company's belief that networking is also "very important" for the sector as a whole.

"International transport is a long chain, and we are all part of it," says marketing manager Ozgur Konacki. "We have seen how important logistics and supply chains were for human life during the pandemic. That's why we try to do our job the best way, and for this reason we always need business partners from different parts of the world."

Konacki says that KTL considers the WCA "the best place" to network. It is an event the company knows well, having participated as a sponsor over the years. This year, the team will attend with its own customised stand and a crowded 30-strong team, representing 10 countries from four continents. But they also bring within them some big news.

"Yes, we have news we are very excited about," Konacki continues. "KTL USA has been established in New Jersey."

"This new division offers a wide range of freight forwarding services, transportation, warehousing, trucking and fulfilment. With a wealth of experience, we are here to provide solutions for our customers, mainly shipping on the transpacific, Transatlantic and north-south trades."

"We want to combine this expertise and knowledge of international transportation with e-commerce solutions in the US. Also, our warehouse is 20 minutes away from the port of New York/New Jersey. Thus, with our nearly 400 colleagues and offices located across the globe, we continue to serve by growing."

Voice
of the Independent

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