

Viewpoint: A Shift in Freight Forwarding Process is Underway

Over the past 15 years, freight forwarding operational staff responsibilities have evolved significantly, to the point where they are performing all the administration duties associated with the job files – but with a new IT driven focus.

Technological advances over this period have led to a dramatic shift in the capabilities of freight forwarding operational staff. Adapting technology with greater end-to-end functionality offers a more seamless forwarding process, enabling freight forwarders to provide more details about shipments and shipment data while offering a higher level of customer service. Today's freight forwarding technology is extremely effective in handling these complex processes, whereas earlier solutions were very time consuming, requiring more intensive software interaction from the operators.





Technological Advances in Logistics Industry Drive Changes in the Role of the Freight Forwarder

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Simon Clark
Business Development Manager - EMEA

Recent advances in technology enable forwarders to focus on the art of forwarding again.

Management today is able to attain more statistics while clients gain more Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), all without an interruption in the freight forwarding process. Without the implementation of a robust single operating platform, this would take a great toll on the amount of time the forwarding clerks have available to them.

In many freight forwarding offices the change to an IT driven process has led to training staff with a focus more on software rather than just the freight movement itself. This shift in focus has occurred in part due to increased productivity requirements, lower costs, time pressures and lack of flexibility in ageing computer systems that are often still in place. And it means that the art of forwarding comes second to that of moving the freight out of the door. Relatively few forwarders have enough time to strategically plan loads, analyze routing options, fish rates fully and balance profit with effort to ensure profitability while keeping clients as happy as possible.

Today, however, with newer streamlined systems in place, we are seeing branch managers and experienced staff who are mentoring again - they are sharing their expertise with the new generation; so we now have IT savvy operators who better understand the intricacies involved in moving freight. Until recently, this type of mentoring was not as common, particularly during the global financial crisis, when freight companies were forced to reduce their staff levels to extremely low levels, often operating with so few staff that there was no mentoring taking place.

Operators are working more creatively.

The past few years have seen a new era in freight and logistics technology built on more modern, user friendly technologies. This is then leveraged with the use of workflow engines that, rather than restrict the creativity of operators, actually promotes forward thinking. Greater systems efficiency is provided by having a fully integrated platform that follows the freight forwarding processes through the entire pipeline from sales initiation to close.

This includes marketing activity in the CRM, through quoting, booking, documentation delivered electronically, customs and compliance, status updates and real time reporting. All of this means that time can be saved by forwarding clerks so that they can focus on the forwarding process rather than just operating a computer. The provision of tools that allow agents to share documents and information quickly and easily over the Web, such as destination agents uploading copies of PODs through the origin agent's website, can provide a dramatic increase in performance in both service to the end customer, as well as time (and cost) savings to the forwarder.

Wrapping this all up in new, easy to use, fully integrated, end-to-end logistics solutions means that the entire business benefits. Managers can have the business intelligence delivered to them automatically through dashboards or on-demand reports with the press of a button. Such modern systems alleviate much of the HR pain being felt by overstressed people with underutilized intellect, allowing staff to be happier and more productive as they learn to forward more effectively.

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