AIR FRANCE-KLM FIRST CARRIER GROUP TO ADOPT DG AUTOCHECK SYSTEM

By Randy Woods

Air France-KLM Cargo has become the first group to adopt IATA’s Dangerous Goods AutoCheck system for acceptance of dangerous-goods shipments.

Of the more than 1.5 million shipments moved by the Franco-Dutch carrier each year, 173,000 fall under the category of dangerous goods, such as caustic chemicals, flammable materials or lithium batteries, said Marcel de Nooijer, executive vice president of AF-KLM Cargo (pictured at left.)

With DG AutoCheck, carriers can manage their dangerous goods manifests on a digital platform that allows shippers and forwarders to instantly assess their Declaration for Dangerous Goods (DGD) against all relevant regulations contained in IATA’s Dangerous Goods Regulations. The tool includes optical character recognition technology that can convert information from paper to digital form and can also access other DGDs for processing and verification.

AF-KLM has been intimately involved with the development of DG AutoCheck for the last few years, said de Nooijer. “This is the perfect example of the industry taking digital transformation seriously. We followed up to provide input to the team actually building AutoCheck. I really see it as a industry effort of the members, together with IATA, to bring this great product to life.”

“Sometimes it takes time to collect all the input from the industry, but the advantage is that when it’s done, it can be implemented on a worldwide basis,” said de Juniac.

DG AutoCheck can facilitate a carrier or ground handler’s decision to accept or reject a shipment during the physical inspection stage by providing a pictorial representation of the shipment to ensure all required labeling and documentation have been provided.

“We will work closely with our ground handling partners to expand the use of DG AutoCheck beyond our hubs,” said de Nooijer, who signed the agreement Wednesday morning with Alexandre de Juniac, Director General of IATA. “In order to have a safe cool chain you have to bring in all the other stakeholders.”

With air cargo demand forecast to double over the next 20 years, the industry needs to remain vigilant that shippers are complying with modern, harmonized standards that facilitate secure, efficient operations, particularly in relation to the carriage of dangerous goods, said Frederic Leger, IATA’s Director of Airport, Passenger, Cargo and Security Products.

DIGITALIZATION TREPIDATION: TURNING WORDS, WORRY INTO ACTION

By Randy Woods

Much has been said this week about the sorry state of the air cargo industry’s alleged lack of digital savvy. For those fed up with such hand-wringing, the late-morning presentations in Wednesday’s Digital Cargo Track were a welcome tonic for air cargo professionals seeking practical advice on how to start their digitalizations efforts without reinventing their businesses.

Boris Hueske, head of digital transformation for Lufthansa Cargo, began by extolling the virtues of the application program interface (API), which is the backbone of every modern digital cargo platform, but not necessarily at the expense of electronic data exchanges (EDIs) that many older cargo operations still rely on.

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Technology geared toward improving the transportation of temperature-sensitive cargo is better than ever. However, there was a consensus during yesterday’s pharma-focused panel discussion, “Discussing air freight operational challenges,” that there is still a long way to go before the industry catches up with the capabilities of today’s technology.

A study from Aspen Global utilized data-logging hardware on real pharma shipments to identify when and where excursions are still taking place in the supply chain, and you could probably guess the results: on airport tarmacs, along longer supply chains with connecting flights, and when cargo is stored in a warehouse without cold storage capabilities.

But even knowing where these vulnerabilities lie and having the technology available to broach them doesn’t mean the industry is beyond these challenges. Panelists—which included industry leaders representing each node of the supply chain, from shipper to airline—seemed to agree that many potentially solvable supply chain disruptions are being perpetuated not by a lack of technology, but by an unwillingness between supply chain partners to share internal data.

“What’s really important is getting the team approach,” said Frank Van Gelder, secretary general at Pharma.aero, an organization dedicated to improving the pharma supply chain. “It’s a slow-moving process, but again, I can’t repeat this enough: it’s the mindset that has to be created.”

The lack of data flow between partners that is stunting digitalization may be rooted in the fear of the accountability that data-sharing brings, which is heightened even more in the case of transporting high-value goods like pharma.

Nina Heinz, global head of network and quality at DHL Global Forwarding, said that, when a pharma shipment is compromised, that expense can easily be in the millions of dollars. Could this be part of why logistics parties are hesitant to rock the boat?

Eddie Weygaerts, transportation manager for pharma giant Pfizer, lent some perspective. He said that, when a pharma shipment is compromised, that expense can easily be in the millions of dollars. Could this be part of why logistics parties are hesitant to rock the boat?

Eddie Weygaerts, a fellow advocate of digitalization, is open to technology rooted in prevention such occurrences, to “know where we need to assist and if there is a failure, how we can ensure next time there is no failure. That’s the only thing I’m interested in,” he said.

Ong Geok Suan, general manager of key accounts and verticals at Singapore Airlines; Winnie Pang, assistant vice president Coolport and eCommerce air hub at SATS; and Fedor Novikov at deputy general director products at AirBridgeCargo all agreed on the benefits that sharing data could have to supply chain optimization, but attested to the notion there is not necessarily a reciprocal willingness to share data among supply chain partners.

Moroccan carrier Royal Air Maroc has become the latest airline to join Cargo iQ, signing up at IATA’s World Cargo Symposium in Singapore on Tuesday. Ariaen Zimmerman, executive director at Cargo iQ (at left), is seen here with Salim Quouninich, director of cargo at Royal Air Maroc, during the March 12 signing ceremony.

By Nina Chamlou
STANDARDS NEEDED TO PROTECT BOOMING ASIAN PHARMA MARKET

By Nina Chamlou

While much of the air cargo market has had its hiccups so far this year, one constant has been the strong outlook for the Asian pharmaceuticals market, which is expected to grow 8.3 percent by 2021 — that is, if the air cargo business can keep it well protected and cool enough in transit.

Dominique Perron, partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers in Switzerland, kicked off Day 2 of the World Cargo Symposium with his presentation on the generally sunny pharma outlook, driven by the ever-increasing population and growing senior demographics that create demand for healthcare products in Southeast Asia.

"In China alone, healthcare is to grow by more than US$50 billion by 2022. So, it’s going to be extremely positive for pharma growth," Perron said, adding that India is another rapidly growing market, in demand for pharma, that should be on the logistics industry radar.

But capitalizing on the high-value market is not without its obstacles. Perron said that while technology has improved, "mastering cold chain remains a challenge." Transporting the highly temperature-sensitive products over long distances to hot climates is a balancing act, and there’s a lot on the line when considering the high-value of the goods.

“We need more standards and controls on the chain to make sure the medicine is still valued at the end,” he said. “The key issue is trust... If someone is not playing the game,” i.e., if a supply chain member is not participating in the facilitation of maintaining a vacuum-tight cold-chain, “the product or the vaccine is gone and the money is wasted.”

Even half a degree in fluctuation could mean a case of pharma products worth thousands of dollars could be ruined, which is a legitimate risk when operating along trade lanes between Europe and Asia, for instance.

Perron named artificial intelligence, blockchain and machine learning as technologies that stand to revolutionize the transport of pharmaceuticals to Asia, by helping logistics companies demonstrate "from A to Z" where the product is in the supply chain in order to avoid spoilage. But he reiterated the industry consensus that there’s still a ways to go before the benefits of such technologies are actualized. "We are still moving but not as fast as expected," he said.

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DIGITAL CARGO  [Continued from p1]

While saying that nothing is inherently wrong with EDIs, Hueske pointed out that they are simply far out of date — like using an old reliable mainframe computer from the 1980s instead of, say, a smartphone. “APIs enable next-level data exchange,” he said. “Compared to EDI, APIs make your data interesting. They can extend your customer reach by allowing you to connect to the rest of the marketplace.”

Hueske said Lufthansa Cargo currently offers five APIs — two public (Shipment tracking, getRoute) and three private ones for clients (getCapacity, getRates smartBooking) — that allow customers unprecedented control of how they want to interact with the carrier.

The key, he said, is to “start out quite small,” with APIs, and “add complexity to it, but not to make it complex.”

Brian Collins, chief technology officer for Accelya, said the key to making the leap to digital is to shift the focus away from the process and more on the overall customer experience. “Currently the airfreight landscape is fragmented and heavily siloed, with legacy systems always at the center,” he said.

“Digital cargo platforms reduce your time to the marketplace, your time to data integration and, on the IT side, they can act as a Swiss Army Knife to get you out of trouble,” Collins said.

He also stressed that the “end user” of a digital platform could be your customers, but they could also be your employees. “You have to understand the pain points for all types of users before you can create a good user experience. Then you can re-define what ‘good’ looks like.”

Jonathan Parkinson, senior manager of cargo information systems at Air Canada Cargo, ended the track with a rousing call for the cargo world to focus on the “why” of digitalization instead of getting hung up on the “what.”

“Why are we doing this in the first place?” he asked. “Because customers and employees want a quick and seamless digital experience.” He also emphasized the focus on meeting the needs of employees, since today’s 2-year-olds that can intuit the average iPad, will be tomorrow’s warehouse workers.

Parkinson also said companies need to encourage “experimentation and a chance to fail and learn about it.” Digitalization, he said, “is a cultural change, but we look too much at the technical aspects.”

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Jonathan Parkinson (left) senior manager of cargo information systems for Air Canada Cargo chats with Henk Mulder, IATA’s head of digital cargo
WHICH ULD FINALIST HAS THE BEST ‘OUTSIDE THE BOX’ INNOVATION? WINNER TO BE CHOSEN TODAY

By Randy Woods

After nearly a week of anticipation, the winner of the International Air Transport Association’s third Air Cargo Innovation Award will be revealed today. This time, all three finalists focused on the same piece of equipment in the supply chain: the ubiquitous unit load device (ULD).

IATA’s judges winnowed down the short list of finalists from 56 entries, covering a wide-range of logistics technologies. The chosen candidates have adopted such innovative and emerging technologies as blockchain and big data to perform ULD management and track-and-trace functions.

During today’s Closing Plenary Session, all three finalists will make their final pitches about how they have transformed these humble containers into high-tech communication and safety devices. Following the presentations, IATA will announce which of finalists will be named “King of the Smart Box.”

The three finalists are as follows:

aeroTHERM

Air New Zealand recently tested and launched this new thermally insulated ULD, aimed at better protecting temperature-sensitive shipments and reducing cost. Designed by Cargo Composites, aeroTHERM includes a fabric door that its designers say provides 25 times the insulation of regular ULD doors and curtains, allowing shipments to stay within desired temperature ranges for longer and reducing the use of thermal covers, wraps and heavier temperature-controlled ULDs. The aeroTHERM curtain, coupled with the aeroBOX’s insulated honeycomb panels, frameless design and secure closure mechanism, work together to minimize energy exchange, keeping shipments cooler or warmer for longer.

Smart ULD

Co-developed by SITA (formerly the Société Internationale de Télécommunications Aéronautiques), French aerospace firm Safran and CHAMP Cargosystems, Smart ULD combines mobile, internet-of-things (IoT) and blockchain technologies to digitally track and monitor ULDs during their transport, providing geolocation, damage reports, and alerts about changes in temperature, shock, vibration and pressure, with the goal of reducing losses or misplacement of ULDs. Smart ULD leverages a specific, event-driven blockchain to organize the full supply chain, bringing more visibility and event transparency to all stakeholders that need to exchange data.

Unilode Digital Transformation

Unilode Aviation Solutions’ concept adds IoT technology to the management of ULDs. Using Bluetooth-based tracking devices, this Digital Transformation program creates transparency throughout the supply chain, enabling customers to use the ULDs themselves to track cargo and transmit status updates about temperature, humidity, shock and light, while offering improved inventory control and reduced incidents of damage to the ULD fleet. The applied technology can also be used by customers to create their own service offering for products like perishables, valuables or sensitive cargo.

The winner will be chosen by an independent jury of industry experts, academics and executives of leading logistics companies, “based upon their assessment of the ideas’ potential to become the basis of a viable new venture, its potential for value creation, and the likelihood of achieving success,” IATA said.

Which of these finalists will be the one with the best “outside the box” thinking? Come see the results at the Closing Plenary!
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