

↳ Duncan Watson

Vice President – Group Commercial Cargo, Worldwide Flight Services

Duncan joined Worldwide Flight Services (WFS) as Vice President – Group Commercial Cargo in November, reporting to WFS' Group Chief Commercial Officer, Barry Nassberg. Based at the company's head office in Roissy, Paris, Duncan's 30-year career has also included 18 years at DHL with local, regional and global commercial responsibilities and 11 years with Emirates Airline, ultimately holding the post of Vice President, Cargo Commercial Operations, based in Dubai, responsible for the airline's cargo operations and commercial activities across the Americas, Africa and the Middle East. ■



(photo: WFS)

What does a typical day in your job entail?

I can't really describe a typical day because each one is different and that's one of the reasons why I love the business. One day can bring a challenge, the next an opportunity. You get to experience an infinite variety of things working with customers across our global network and it's an exhilarating working environment.

What attracts you to the air cargo business?

It's dynamic, it's different – and it's an industry that's so important to all our daily lives. I also get to travel a lot because we work with over 270 airlines globally. I especially enjoy the face-to-face interaction with our customers, whether that's in their head office, our HQ or at an industry conference.

How significant is cargo handling for the business?

Air cargo is the biggest part of our business. WFS is the world's largest air cargo handler and the WFS network spans 198 airports in 22 countries on five continents. For me, the most exciting aspect of our business is that we still have a great platform

for growth. There are still lots of places on the map where we haven't planted our flag yet. We have a significant opportunity to grow and the ambition and resources to leverage our customer relationships. This includes using our reputation for high quality, safe and secure cargo handling to influence customers to work with WFS for ground handling too because this is another part of our business we are determined to grow rapidly.

What key trend are you seeing in the air cargo market today?

You only need to read the industry media to know the cargo market has had a tough start to 2019 in terms of volumes – but that's largely because we're comparing it to 2017 and 2018, which were fantastic years. If we were to compare where we are now to 2015/16, you'd say we're doing okay. I think the first half of the year and the summer months may remain challenging, but I do think things will improve as we move into the peak season and we'll see a stronger, more robust end to the year.

We continue to see perishables, pharmaceuticals and e-commerce as engines of growth. I certainly think our airline customers are looking for more from their handling partners

and we see much more willingness to sit round the table and to genuinely engage in conversations about how we can create value on both sides of the fence. We welcome these discussions and we are keen to explore every opportunity – including things handlers have probably never thought about before – but whatever we agree must be sustainable. We want more consistency because that's the basis on which we can all get more value from our relationships.

CEIV Pharma certification is gaining momentum worldwide. How important is this standard at WFS?

What's important to us is what our customers want. In the case of pharma, we have some facilities with CEIV accreditation and others which are compliant with Good Distribution Practice (GDP). What these requirements help to demonstrate is the important role handlers play in maintaining the integrity of cool chains. Whereas, traditionally, we've seen airline-

handler and forwarder-shipper relationships, we're now engaging in four-way discussions because everyone has a role to play to meet their compliance commitments.

WFS is building a pharma facility in Copenhagen. Why was this location chosen for this investment?

Copenhagen is a very good pharma market. It's as simple as that. But this is not the only market where we are investing in our pharma handling capabilities. We've just certified the first GDP compliant facility for pharma in New York JFK, for example, with our launch customer, Swiss WorldCargo. We will also be opening other facilities over the next 12 months. When we do, it won't just be airlines that attend the opening, there'll also be shippers and forwarders too because they will direct their carrier partners to work with handlers that earn their trust and confidence in terms of handling their products correctly. Pharma facilities require a significant investment, but ►

There is ongoing investment in facilities including at JFK
(photo: WFS)





[top] WFS has a strong cargo handling presence in Europe and the US (photo: WFS)

[bottom] The cargo sector should see a stronger, more robust end to the year (photo: WFS)

they pay off in the longer-term. We have the ability to make these investments and we're ready to do so if we get the volume commitments we need to achieve the right level of ROI or if they give us an opportunity to leverage business opportunities elsewhere in our network.

WFS recently expanded its client based in Dallas. How significant has the North American market become?

It is a very significant market for WFS and we have more plans for growth under the leadership of our new Executive Vice President for the Americas, Mike Simpson. Following our acquisition of Consolidated Aviation Services and its successful integration into WFS over the last couple of years, we're now looking for a new phase of growth. We will also be making investments in facilities – such as our 15-year lease on a new state-of-the-art, 346,000ft² cargo terminal at New York JFK. It will also offer improved cargo flows and reduce transfer times, shorten truck waiting times and incorporate the latest security and screening systems and procedures. There's plenty more in the pipeline in the Americas too.

What are your plans for future global growth and investment?

Before I joined WFS, I was aware of the company's plans for growth but now I'm inside the business and have full visibility, I am even more excited by what we can achieve over the next 3-4 years. We have a great leadership team under our Group CEO, Craig Smyth, and we are ambitious. We want growth and we will invest in achieving it with customers and partners that want to build a sustainable future with us. ■

