



➤ From the ground, up

Worldwide Flight Services is a major player in air cargo handling. **Keith Mwanalushi** speaks to Group Chief Commercial Officer, Barry Nassberg about global expansion and investment in new technologies

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

The continued positive momentum in freight growth into 2018 reflects the fact that demand drivers for air cargo remain supportive. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) in its February 2018 cargo strategy highlights that the cargo business continues to benefit from a strong cyclical upturn in volumes, with some recovery in yields.

Worldwide Flight Services (WFS) has extended its cargo handling business in several markets and 2017 was a banner year for the company in terms of volumes and growth of the business. "While we don't foresee sustained growth at the same rate in 2018, we do believe that traffic will continue to grow despite the threat of tariffs and trade wars," Barry Nassberg tells Airline Cargo Management.

North American operations saw a successful start to 2018 at several US stations with a series of significant contract gains boosting the growth WFS is seeing in its existing customers' volumes.

For example, Nassberg highlights the recently signed new cargo handling contracts at Houston's

George Bush Intercontinental Airport with Turkish Airlines for its freighter services. Also, Aer Lingus in Seattle for its new four times weekly flights to Dublin and in Miami, and with Ethiopian Airlines to support a new route from Addis Ababa.

DHL Air has also renewed contracts with WFS in both Kansas City and St. Louis.

Looking ahead in the US, WFS aims to tap opportunities in the lucrative New York air cargo market by signing a 15-year lease on a new state-of-the-art, 346,000sq ft cargo terminal. "This represents the first phase of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's comprehensive vision plan to enhance the international reputation of JFK airport, where WFS is already one of the largest handlers managing over 650,000 tonnes of cargo a year for nearly 70 airlines" states Nassberg.

The projected opening of the new building in the Q4/20, according to Nassberg, will support WFS' commitment to providing the highest standards of safety, security and service, and will also enable it

to offer JFK's first dedicated facilities for temperature-controlled pharmaceutical products and perishables cargo.

He says the facility will have a throughput capacity of over 300 million kilos a year and will offer improved cargo flows and reduced transfer times, shorter truck waiting times and incorporate the latest security and screening systems and procedures.

Nassberg warns however that recruiting and employee retention are key challenges in the US. He notes that rising wages through various initiatives are helping, though continuing education of the airline community is needed to understand these are statutorily mandated increases.

"These ultimately make airport service jobs more attractive, and that means everyone wins."

He also observes that global carriers are no longer willing to accept operating standards in the US which are inferior to the rest of the world and are insisting on facilities and technology now commonplace elsewhere.

Over in Europe, Qatar Airways Cargo recently extended its cargo handling contract with WFS in Paris. In addition to managing an existing cargo handling contract, WFS is now providing ramp transportation for the airline, moving cargo to and from the warehouse and the aircraft on Qatar Airways' three flights a day from Paris to Doha.

"We were very pleased that Qatar Airways expressed their confidence in WFS by expanding their contract."



Barry Nassberg, Group Chief
Commercial Officer, WFS
(photo: WFS)

Handling a busy thrice daily operation and the responsibility for the whole chain from acceptance of cargo to delivery to the aircraft surely involves a meticulous sequence of events. Nassberg explains that everything from facilities, qualified and well trained staff, responsive management, security systems, IT and data management must all come together to provide the standards the company commits to.

"We strive to achieve this every day, for all our customers, we have the ability to manage high frequency operations." ►

The JFK facility will have
throughout capacity of over
300 million kilos a year
(photo: WFS)



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Barry Nassberg, Worldwide Flight Services

He justifies this by saying it comes down to strict adherence to effective processes and procedures, effective training programmes, and the high level of experience and expertise in the team of over 22,800 employees worldwide.

“Airlines can clearly see both the value their handling partners deliver as well as when their performance levels do not meet their KPIs [key performance indicator] or the service standards they expect for their customers.

“They award contracts based on this knowledge and therefore we have been successful in growing our relationships with major airlines at multiple stations across our network because they recognise our expertise and the consistency we deliver,” Nassberg explains.

In March this year, WFS announced that Cathay Pacific Cargo had awarded it with new cargo handling contracts in both Brussels and Copenhagen.

The Hong Kong-based carrier has signed a three-year contract with WFS to provide cargo handling for its new Brussels-Hong Kong direct service which started on March 25th. Cathay Pacific operates four flights a week on the route, transporting passengers and belly-hold cargo onboard its Airbus A350-900s. WFS expects to handle some seven million kgs of cargo and mail per annum for Cathay in Brussels. WFS will also continue to provide handling for Cathay Pacific's trucking network to and from Belgium.

In addition, the airline has also selected WFS for cargo handling in Copenhagen. Cathay Pacific commences a seasonal tri-weekly direct service to the Danish capital from May 2nd.

WFS will support Ethiopian Airlines' services from Addis Ababa. (photo: Airbus)



This is the latest in a series of new contract successes for WFS in Brussels, which last month announced agreements with CAL Cargo Airlines, Japan Airlines, MNG Airlines and Oman Air. Brussels Airport is also the first WFS cargo station in Europe to achieve IATA's CEIV pharma certification. WFS also opened a dedicated temperature-controlled pharma handling facility in Copenhagen at the end of 2017.

CEIV certification aims at improving pharmaceutical handling excellence for air cargo operators. And separately, Good Distribution Practices (GDP) is a quality system for warehouse and distribution centres dedicated for medicines.

Nassberg recognises the growing demands of the pharma market, and the benefits of meeting the objective standards of industry certification. “We don't believe one size fits all, and there are reasons why one of these [CEIV or GDP] may be more suitable at a given station than the other. We achieved both GDP and IATA CEIV pharma at several stations over the past year. Our goal is to qualify for at least one of them at all our hub stations and all stations with significant pharma traffic over the coming 12 to 18 months.”

New technologies ranging from digitisation and advanced analytics to artificial intelligence and robotics should also help the cargo industry to process the growing volumes anticipated in the coming years more efficiently.

“We're integrating four different cargo management systems across our network into one,” reports Nassberg.

He states that plans include providing customers with an online dashboard for real-time reporting on the status of shipments and tracking of trucks, as well as truck dock allocation systems with the ability to confirm on-line dock slots.

“Our most significant investment is in security management systems. We are introducing across our network the newest generation of screening technology and centralised management, through a control centre, with all security screening and site monitoring activity.”

WFS also sees further scope for technology to become a more integral part in training. Technology will play an ever increasing role, allowing for classroom simulation of real world environments, use of immersive VR [virtual reality], online training programmes, and automated auditing of compliance, he states.

“We have a renewed focus on activities in our training college in Paris and are also developing courses on behalf of freight forwarders and airlines,” says Nassberg.

In 2017, WFS' training facility Airport Collage was recognised as one of the world's top 10 aviation training providers by IATA. "Our Airport College was established in 2000 to provide training for our own employees to meet mandatory aviation industry requirements. However, we soon identified a high level of demand from other companies requiring professional training services for their cargo and ground handling personnel, so we now offer that."

When looking at the biggest opportunities for cargo handlers Nassberg feels it's important to become integral to the supply chain. "To move beyond being a warehouse interface between the airline and the forwarder."

And he says the biggest challenges for cargo handlers is the need to innovate, improve efficiency in a demanding market and use technological solutions to overcome the difficulty in recruiting labour in many markets.

WFS obviously has a strong cargo handling presence in Europe and the US but what are the prospects for global reach? "We are targeting Asia, Africa, and South America," he responds, and adds that each of those markets had opportunities appropriate

to the network development strategy. And, they included countries that welcome investment by a global cargo handler capable of boosting capacity and traffic.

"We know that many of the airlines we already work with in Europe and the US would value us offering the same levels of service in these other important markets."

In concluding and rather importantly, Nassberg observes that the airlines' cargo handling requirements are changing. "Service standard requirements are steadily increasing, there is greater focus on the need to support specialised product lines and there is a demand for greater degrees of technological integration with the carriers and forwarders," he says.

At the time of this writing media reports in the US had suggested that several WFS employees might lose their jobs at the American Airlines freight facility at Philadelphia International Airport by June because the airline has not renewed its contract – but the details remained sketchy.

In the meantime, WFS looks geared up to expand its air cargo capabilities to the next level. ■



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