

## A watching brief as history was made

### How charted the evolution and revolution of an industry

So much has happened since the launch of IFW in 1971 – although its roots go back even further, to the late 1960s, when it was known as *Ports and Terminals*.

The change of the newspaper's title to *International Freighting Weekly (IFW)* mirrored the transformation in the industry as a whole. Freighting was maturing very quickly, a development brought about by the dual forces of containerisation and the rapid growth of globalisation and trade.

Containerisation in shipping and the advent of wide-bodied aircraft on long-haul routes were the driving forces in the '70s and early '80s – changes matched later by the arrival of the express integrators, flourishing ro-ro and shortsea traffic, the introduction of a single European market, the further loosening of trade tariffs and, ultimately, liberalisation under WTO rules.

Many state-owned transport organisations were privatised and had to conform to the demands of increasingly free markets.

Intermodalism evolved, and the concept of outsourcing and third-party logistics (3PL) took hold, creating a new sub-industry in itself. And 3PL evolved into 4PL and threatened at one time to even become 5PL, whatever that would be. *IFW* even flirted with the idea in the 1990s of re-branding itself as *Logistics Week*, to match the new buzzword.

Technology moved on at an immense pace, most obviously in computers. E-mail and the internet revolutionised the way people do business, move freight and run their lives.

Less visible to the public eye, the evolution of gigantic ships being unloaded by enormous cranes created the economies of scale that meant it was cheaper to produce goods halfway round the world from the consumer than half a mile from his home.

The globalisation of manufacturing

revolutionised the world stage, bringing forth rapid developments in the economies of many former low-wage countries in Asia, and elsewhere. Places such as Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore moved up the chain from low-value manufacturers into sophisticated hi-tech production bases and wealthy consumer markets.

The same pattern has been taking place more recently, but on a vastly bigger scale, in China, a country which when *IFW* launched was in the midst of Mao's disastrous "Cultural Revolution". How things have changed in a country which the world of freight and logistics has helped transform into an emerging superpower.

Similar evolutions, or revolutions, have taken place following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the expansion of the European Union – involving several former Soviet states and satellites – within which national borders and customs formalities and tariffs have been largely dissolved. And Russia, along with other emerging major economies such as India and Brazil, has moved, sometimes unsteadily, on a path towards becoming a major regional economic and trading power.

Meanwhile, oil and gas revenues are causing whole new cities to rise from the desert in the Middle East, creating powerful new economies and important freight and logistics hubs and markets.

Reflecting globalisation of manufacturing and liberalisation of trade, shippers, carriers and forwarders – and allied sectors – have undergone rapid consolidation, wiping away old and much-loved company names and creating mega-logistics providers. But meanwhile, thankfully, some smaller, niche players have survived and prospered.

Other major recent developments include the global pre-occupation with anti-terrorist security following the attack on New York's World Trade Centre in 2001; renewed concerns about the potentially disastrous effects of global warming, and the

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