



# Technology enablers

IT companies offer systems that can improve an air freight services provider's efficiency in many ways. The UK head of NIIT tells **Mike Bryant** how new technology can provide at least a partial answer to the needs of a changing air freight industry and the business community it serves

**R**avi Pandey, an NIIT Technologies senior vice president and the man responsible for the UK business of the Delhi-headquartered IT systems company, believes: "Crucial to an air carrier's success in today's highly competitive environment is its ability to access business-critical information quickly."

Pandey pointed out: "To maintain a lead in a market well known for its volatility, air freight companies are relying on new technologies to conduct detailed evaluations of their operations."

He believes that NIIT offers just such systems

in its product portfolio, the type of technologies that allow the various types of companies within the air freight industry to gather data at different points along the transportation supply chain and save it in a 'data warehouse' in order to create their own comprehensive storehouse of information.

"The goal is to accurately measure the quality, transportation times, on-time performance and freight delivery at the point of arrival in an effort to make transportation processes more reliable," Pandey outlined.

The volatility of which he speaks is not just related to changes in customer demand caused

by various macroeconomic variables; there are also structural changes taking place within the industry itself.

"Air freight companies within the logistics industry are among the fastest business adopters of IT," he observed. Although the sector has been reaping the benefits of enormous numbers of different IT developments for decades, recently the utilisation of all sorts of information technology has increased significantly, particularly over the course of the last decade when the air cargo community has come under tremendous pressures.

"Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the transportation industry has become increasingly vigilant about air cargo security and compliance and, while freight forwarders and air carriers have always understood that these are critical areas of concern, increased demands in terms of visibility and reporting requirements have led to far more complex processes," Pandey related.

The air cargo sector, and the role IT plays within it, is changing for many other reasons, he argues: "Shipping businesses are fast catching up on speed and are looking to grab a bigger piece of the air freight and transport pie – the air freight industry needs to stay competitive to remain ahead."

"Furthermore, China's strong economic growth, coupled with the sheer size of its economy, is causing rapid changes in production patterns and trade flows not only within East Asia but also between the region and other markets further afield.

"A robust and credible air freight industry is necessary to cope with the demands of China's growing production chains," Pandey considers.

## INTEGRATED SYSTEMS

"Globalisation has led to improvements in logistics and infrastructure, and also to new patterns of provision, in both the type and quality of transport used. The modern concept of multi-modal transport has shifted the cargo delivery system away from 'port-to-port' to 'door-to-door'," he contests, a further reason for the change in industry requirements from information-based systems towards what might be called knowledge-based technologies.

"Integration is key to today's IT systems," Pandey declared. "The shift to data modelling is helping the industry to avail itself of accurate,



Pandey: "air freight companies are relying on new technologies"

fact-based information to improve the efficiency of the business. Data modelling supports a whole realm of processes such as the identification and tracking of shipments at multiple locations, routing, packaging, warehousing and storage and carrier assignments."

The 2010-11 financial year "started with much enthusiasm", Pandey said, "with the Asian market the driving force behind this trend.

"We see aggression in the market and, while this may not always translate into hard capital, what is apparent is that customers have a clearer idea of what they need and want."


He went on: "Today's customers are more aware of the 'must-have' features in terms of functionality and service and this expertise will help their IT partners to focus on how best to reach their client base."

## ASIAN INFLUENCE

Considering Asia as that 'driving force', Pandey observes: "Currently, there is a paradigm shift taking place in the composition of air traffic, with cargo emerging as a key growth area in the Asia Pacific region."

He is quick to point out NIIT's involvement in the area, especially in the deployment of its state-of-the-art cargo operations system COSYS at many of the Far East's major air freight terminals – at Asia Airfreight Terminal in Hong Kong, Singapore Airport Terminal Services (SATS) in Singapore, Beijing Aviation Ground Services in China and Evergreen Air Cargo Services in Taiwan.

COSYS is specifically designed to provide tailor-made e-Freight compliant solutions and NIIT Technologies has partnered with SATS to market and implement the cargo handling solution to other ground handlers and airlines globally. "The benefits are vast," Pandey went on, in terms of "improved operational efficiency, automation of processes leading to reduction in costs and faster and more accurate information exchange, reduced cargo mishandling and more satisfied customers."

"Adopting global best practices in cargo ground handling will ensure an integrated management of cargo reservations and ground operations spanning all sectors of the air cargo industry – from flight planning and in-bound cargo operations, to billing and shipment tracking," he concluded. 

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