

Victor's marketing material targets high-end clients



TOURING TRANSPORT TRADERS

Whether it's transporting rock n roll royalty to a tropical island in a private jet or moving a garage band's drum kit to the next flea pit, service remains key to success in a transport sector increasingly under pressure to cut corners.

As more and more artists rely on their touring activity for revenue, the demands on those who supply everything from splitter vans to convoys of trucks, and mini vans to state-of-the-art star coaches, is ever increasing. From our investigations, it seems that those companies that are prepared to invest heavily in their fleet are winning the race for new contracts. And as productions at the top end of the scale grow ever bigger in terms of personnel, and heavier in terms of equipment, the spoils can be rich indeed.

Established in 2003 in London by Dino Williams and Adam Hatton, Global Motion is now one of the live music industry's leading freight forwarders with offices in Los Angeles, Auckland, Toronto and Sydney. It has taken productions to destinations as far and wide as Tahiti and Tashkent, and worked with Gorillaz when they became the first band to play in Syria.

Hatton says that since Global Motion launched a decade ago it has aimed to make a certain profit on

each job, with a fixed margin, building a reputation based on quality of service and reasonable pricing. But while Hatton says his company continues to enjoy robust business, the freight-forwarding sector has come under increasing pressure from clients looking to cut costs. As touring has become a more important revenue stream for bands and management, Hatton has seen increased attempts to save as much money as possible by reducing the amount of time people are on the road. "As a result itineraries have become much more compressed – they are trying to push everything into a short period, which makes our job more challenging," he says.

Hatton believes the market is being shaken by a price war: "It has become a bun fight to win

artists: prices are spiralling down, people want cost effectiveness, but it comes at the price of service. Some of our competitors are so desperate to win business that they have quoted to supply their services at cost, hoping to build a relationship with a band and make money down the line. They ended up making a loss because there were problems. Flights get delayed, problems occur and more resources are needed, without the margin you are not able to finance that," says Hatton.

Rock-it Cargo was established in 1978, prompting business development manager Matt Wright to comment, "We have a wealth of knowledge and expertise that far outweighs any of our competitors." He believes that ever tightening border controls are having a big impact on the freight business. "The single biggest issue, in our opinion, is the security regime that is currently becoming more and more restrictive for the tighter schedules," Wright says.

Highlighting how Rock-it's experience allows it to find flexible solutions, Wright cites, "Having to put 'plan c' into action after 'plan a' and 'plan b', which had been in place for six months, suddenly decide to disappear from the table." Deciding not to name the client in question, he adds, "This involved a lot of last minute planning and pulling together a lot of expertise to make sure it worked to move the freight from one continent to another within the time frame we had."

High Flyers

At the luxury end of the transport market, the private aircraft charter business is also being affected by tightened budgets. "We are seeing a lot more pressure on budgets and so someone that has used the same broker for years is now being told to try somewhere new," says Mike Ryan, operations director at Victor.

Ryan says that Victor enjoyed a 300% increase in music industry clients last year, attracting both established rock and pop stars together with a new breed of touring dance acts and DJs. He believes that Victor's growth is due to its fixed margin, service and open approach to doing business. "We tell clients the name of operator involved, that we get a 5% margin and we show them the exact aircraft they will be travelling on; the whole process is absolutely

The interior of an MM Band Services coach



transparent. But the big brokers that currently control 80% of the market don't want it that way," he says.

Premiere Aviation was launched by Adrian Whitmarsh in 1994, and has partner companies in the United States and Australia. Whitmarsh is seeing increased demand from clients whose world tours include new and emerging markets: "With that comes the need to understand issues of obtaining flight permits, airport coordination and dealing with sub-contractors in new markets where things don't necessarily happen as quickly as we're used to in North America or Europe," says Whitmarsh.

Premiere Aviation's founder has more than 30 years experience in the aviation industry and says that with customs, immigration and security procedures becoming increasingly complicated and protracted, extensive knowledge of the global business is vital. Whitmarsh observes that a successful operator requires the capability to organise operational flight support at a moment's notice. "Travellers have little idea of what it takes to plan and arrange all the elements of a flight half way across the world; flight permits, traffic regulations, customs and immigration rules, crew and passenger visas, landing slots and handling suppliers. There are still many countries that require many days notice before allowing flights to cross their airspace or land in their airports. Many governments and authorities have simply not kept pace with global business," he says.

Air Partner charters private and commercial jets as well as freight aircraft. It has offices throughout Europe, North America, the Middle East and Asia and mans a 24/7 flight operations centre. "There is a need for the account manager to work 24/7 during a tour, so the tour manager knows they can make one phone call and speak to someone they trust," says senior account manager Nicola Taylor.

The aircraft charter market is unregulated, and Taylor claims some operators concentrate on offering the cheapest, rather than the best, option: "We have our own in-house quality regulations and systems to help provide consistency, however not all brokers are as responsible. Air Partner has been in the aviation industry for over 50 years and is the only company of its kind to hold a Royal Warrant – a mark of excellence." Taylor believes good service is not just about understanding how to put an itinerary together but also understanding the requirements of the band and the tour manager. "Careful scheduling of programmes on show days and an understanding of how the band may feel on aftershow flights is very important," she says. "For example, they are likely to be exhausted and may need a private room to change at the airport prior to boarding."

Hitting the Road in Style

Being sensitive to an artist's needs is equally important on the road, as Mike Moulds of MM Band Services attests. Operating throughout Europe, MM Band Services has a fleet of 10 double decker buses that can accommodate anything from seven to 16 beds, and all sizes in between. It currently has four new coaches under construction, some convertible from band to star buses via the creation of a double bedroom.

Moulds says his business has expanded every year for the past eight and it counts the likes of Lady Gaga, Foo Fighters and Mumford & Sons among its clients. He predicts 2014 will be another year of growth. "A lot of people at the lower end of the market are going to go out of business, but those

that continue to invest will be a success. Since we started re-investing, the standard of business and amount of business has gone up. When you spend £500,000 (€607,000) per vehicle you attract a better class of client," says Moulds.

Beat The Street's Tim Fortnam-King says that size also matters when it comes to coaches. After six weeks at sea, January saw two of Beat The Street's 45-foot star buses arrive in Australia to be used by Dolly Parton on a month's tour there. Yet he too is seeing the impact of fiscal frugality. "More tours are requiring the use of 16-berth buses that a few years ago wouldn't have been considered, however the economic factors now dictate it. We are continuously trying to come up with new ideas for the internal layouts of our buses to make life on the road that much more bearable," says Fortnam-King.

Trucking Talent's Tools

Speaking from New Zealand, where he is helping to run Transam Trucking's 24-hour service, founder Mark Guterres says his company counts the likes of Elton John and the Rolling Stones among its clients. In early 2011 Edwin Shirley Trucking (EST) went in to administration and Transam acquired its trucking division in a deal worth £1.6million (€1.9m). The addition of EST's 30 vehicles, its drivers and board directors, meant that Transam became Europe's biggest specialist operator with a 150-truck fleet.



Rock-it Cargo prepare equipment for shipping

Crew load equipment on to an Allgaier truck



After having to adhere to a swathe of European emissions regulations, recent UK legislation has allowed Transam to begin operating three new supersize trucks that are two metres longer than anything previous allowed on the road. "We call them 'big boy' trailers because they are enormous," says Guterres. "We built them much higher, because there is no limit to height in the UK, and over a five-truck tour it means you lose a truck. Technology has begun to work in our favour, but the trucks can only be used in the UK. If they allow these big trailers in mainland Europe that will really help."

In such a competitive market, it's not surprising that existing hauliers occasionally trundle on to the landscape. German logistics giant, Allgaier Group, operates 400 self-owned trucks and recently launched Allgaier UK Event Logistic Ltd to expand into the entertainment industry. Michael Steffen, Allgaier UK's senior director sales & marketing says, "In the 70s I started touring in the UK with a bunch of lorries for the likes of Saga, Mike Oldfield, Supertramp, Scorpions and many more. Nowadays I am proud to be working for the first multinational operation, which steps into the entertainment market with a self-owned fleet of brand new Megacube trailers."

Allgaier's long term goal is to continuously invest in more shares of established logistic companies within the entertainment industry. "We are determined to set new standards in this challenging area of the entertainment business and are looking forward to impressing more and more artists, agencies and management with our performance in logistics," adds Steffen. ■