



Air Cargo Integrators: Kenya's pride in Dubai



Massive 3PL offers state-of-the-art facilities for import-driven economy



"We have a fully automated, multi-modal warehousing facility in DWC where we can provide wide range of specialist services under variant temperatures from chilled to controlled to ambient." - Lionel Smith.

With a towering height, it's impossible not to notice Lionel Smith in a crowd. This Indian-descent entrepreneur from Kenya also stands out for building a business empire from scratch.

Smith moved to Kenya in 1988 to set up and operate duty free stores at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. Working closely with multinationals such as Philip Morris and Samsonite, he set up his own business in distribution of various branded products in 1993.

"I sold my business in 1998 and moved with my family to Dubai to seek opportunities in the aviation industry, an industry I have always been very passionate about," Smith recalled.

With not much capital but plenty of guts and strong business acumen, he set up Air Cargo Integrators (ACI) in 2001.

Thereafter, doors of opportunities opened for Smith and he seized every moment by working hard, day and night, to build a business that represented a true reflection of his personality – trustworthy, ethical and transparent.

"I started as a one-man show. From sales and customer service to operational functions, handling all paperwork and accounting, I literally did everything!" he fondly recalled his early years in the business.

Nurturing a trusted name

Within just a few years, under Smith's management, the company expanded steadily, as did the stature of the company and ACI was arguably known as the most reliable airfreight solutions provider with expertise on distress and wartorn zones.

Among its customer base of multinationals and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in particular, ACI was the premier choice when it

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came to specialised movement of relief goods and supplies to war-besieged Afghanistan and Iraq.

"We worked directly with all the major NGOs like Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Save the Children, UNICEF and WFP. We worked with all the local and international freight forwarders. We have been in partnership with Etihad Airways since 2006 operating a 747 freighter on weekly bases into Kabul Airport. This partnership and support from Etihad has been invaluable to us. Our presence in Afghanistan even after the liberation has been instrumental in the re-habilitation of the country," said Smith.

Since 2004, ACI continues its freight forwarding activities in Afghanistan.

The company's highly experienced team is based in Kabul Airport and City to provide services to loyal customers with local handling, clearance and door-to-door delivery within the country.

ACI has been very active in Iraq since the US-led invasion began in 2003.

"We had contracts to operate passenger flights to all the major airports and air bases during the

invasion of Iraq," said Smith and stressed that at its peak, his company was operating over 1,000 flights a year into Iraq.

"From Dubai and Kuwait into Basra, Baghdad, Erbil, Mosul, Kirkuk and other air bases, we covered all of Iraq. We still offer viable solutions to our customers into Iraq."

ACI continues to be focused on hard to reach areas like Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen and even Libya.

"Our specialty is in areas which are difficult to access. For example, we have been successful in flying wide body freighters with humanitarian supplies into Sana'a, Yemen. We complete difficult air operations in cities hit with natural disasters such as Kathmandu. We have the experience and expertise to provide solutions for emergencies," Smith said with confidence.

When asked to share his thoughts on how to grow a business, Smith said: "I believe that one needs to be patient and persistent. One needs to develop a stable reputation. One needs to build confidence and credibility among colleagues. These elements

will cement your presence in the market and the community at large will have faith your intentions and you will get support from all around you."

"It took us years to build the platform we stand on today. Our hard work and perseverance; our business ethics and respect for people within our fraternity and most importantly, the high level of standards we have maintained reflects who we are and what we stand for today. Our ability to maintain relationships with our customers who have been with us since 2001, speaks for itself and we look forward to carrying on the same pace and style with new and emerging local and international businesses in this industry," he added.

By 2013, Smith had decided to expand their company's scope to include freight forwarding and logistics services.

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Massive 3PL

An astute businessman, Smith began working on his 3PL warehouse project two years ago with a vision to make it a profitable venture attuned with the needs of the import-driven economy of the UAE.

Strategically located in Dubai World Central (DWC), ACI's newly-built 8,100-sqm logistic facility is within the precincts of Al Maktoum International Airport, an emerging airport hub serving as a multi-modal logistics hub for more than 12 million

tons of freight per year.

This state-of-the-art facility caters to an array of industries, which include: Manufacturing, Industrial, Retail, FMCG, Healthcare, Oil & Gas, Automotive Logistics and Humanitarian Relief Services.

"We have a fully automated, multi-modal warehousing facility in DWC where we can provide wide range of specialist services under variant temperatures from chilled to controlled to ambient," said Smith.

The warehouse is designed to

accommodate up to 10,000 pallet positions; offering range of expert handling services complimented with the latest innovations in warehouse software management systems.

"With this mix we can offer complete solutions to small and medium enterprises," said Smith.

Smith credits the UAE leadership for his exponential business growth, coupled with patience, good reputation and credibility.

"Dubai has given us many opportunities to fulfill our dreams and ambitions. I attribute my company's success to the great leadership of our country. And I hope I can contribute towards the growth of this beautiful country in the same way," the businessman said.

Over the next 10 years, Smith projects the UAE logistics industry to double if not quadruple in size.

"Logistics in the UAE has a great potential. It is growing from strength to strength and I believe that there are huge requirements for logistics and 3PL facilities within new and existing industrial and commercial sectors. Demand is growing rapidly and I see growth of up to 200 percent within the next 10 years," Smith surmised.

About ACI

Founded in 2001, Air Cargo Integrators (ACI) provides total integrated package solutions for multi-modal freight requirements. With an unwavering commitment to customer satisfaction, the company provides innovative, efficient and cost effective methods to keep the supply chain unbroken.



Based in the United Arab Emirates, ACI's offices are located in the Jumeirah Lake Towers (JLT) and Dubai World Central (DWC), Dubai. A global network with offices in Kabul, Mumbai, Nairobi and London Heathrow, ACI is reputed for personalized, reliable and unmatched services.

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