

### Table Of Contents

Executive Summary	4
About The Study	5
Question Marks for the Future of Freight	6
Eroding Margins	7
Customer Expectations	8-11
Emerging Players	12
Carriers	12
Large tech companies	12-13
Why Decision Makers Remain Confident	14-15
Leveraging Technology	16-18
Value-Add Service Offerings	19
Growth	19
The Future? Data Not Hardware	20

# Executive Summary

Key changes in the freight industry - both positive and negative - spell out an uncertain future. Research from over 90 logistics professionals at the world's largest freight companies shows three emerging trends threatening traditional business models and spelling out a new "Future of Freight":

1. Eroding margins and commoditization of core logistics services.

**2. Customer expectations** are higher and more volatile. They expect transparency, more frequent, market-relevant pricing and enhanced supply chain IT support. Changing supply chain trends are primarily manifested in shorter contract lengths, increased spot quoting, and provider consolidation.

3. Emerging players like technology giants and carriers are looming threats for logistics providers.



## The Solution

Despite these service offerings as the dominant strategy for thriving in a changing industry:

- **1.Technology** is the preferred method (86%) to drive efficiency and reduce costs. New transportation hardware like drones is perceived as over-hyped, while online sales platforms are seen as a real opportunity.
- **2.Value-Add Service Offerings** are the next most-preferred method of increasing profits (63%), as core services (air, ocean, and trucking freight) become less profitable.
- 3.Growth, organic or via acquisition, is the only other popular method to escape yield dilution (50%).



## Data, Not Hardware

Logistics is notorious for being an old-fashioned business, but changing shipper expectations, new market players and eroded margins have prompted industry leaders to reassess strategies.

Leading logistics service providers remain optimistic, turning to technology to keep up with changing market conditions. The core infrastructure required to move freight - containers, planes and trucks - is not fundamentally changing, but improving data movement that guides freight movement is key to increasing efficiency. Global forwarders and carriers provide physical connectivity with trade lines and agent connections that span the world. They're now championing new connectivity with data technology, enabling logistics providers to build value while reducing cost.

# About The Study

To understand freight professionals' attitudes toward industry changes, an independently verified survey<sup>1</sup> was sent to leading freight professionals. The quesions spanned a range of topics, focusing on the industry's evolution over the next five years and preparations for the future.<sup>2</sup>

Senior decision makers from the world's largest logistics companies responded. 90% of the responses came from top 100 companies, with 19 of the top 20 global 3PLs represented in the responses. The combined logistics services revenue of the companies for which respondents work exceeds \$210 billion annually, alluding to the potential impact that these decision makers.

Respondents hold influential positions in the industry, including six C-level/Board level respondents, 27 Directors, 27 Vice Presidents or Senior Vice Presidents, and 20 Business Unit Heads. Respondents were from relevant business units - predominantly Sales, Operations, Business Development, Strategy and Pricing.



#### 92 senior professionals from the world's top logistics companies responded

**19/20** OF TOP FOWARDERS REPRESENTED IN SURVEY

#### \$210+ BILLION COMBINED REVENUE OF RESPONDENTS' COMPANIES

Freightos thanks all survey respondents for sharing their valuable time and insights.



<sup>1</sup>Verified by Cathy Roberson, founder of Logistics Trends and Insights, a logistics research and consulting service.

<sup>2</sup>The full list of questions can be accessed at freightos.com/fof-questions/

6

# Question Marks For The Future Of Freight

Cross-border trade has grown massively in recent decades, with a colossal \$18.93 trillion worth of goods imported/exported in 2015.<sup>3</sup> Global freight is the engine that powers international trade. 90% of global trade is seaborne,<sup>4</sup> shipped in 700 million containers every year<sup>5</sup> and 185 billion tonne-kilometers are flown annually.<sup>6</sup>

China opened up for business in the late 1980s, providing cheap, reliable production. The ensuing trade boom, much of it from Asia to the West, was a windfall for global freight.

Trade grew rapidly until the 2008 recession dealt a tough blow to the world of freight. Since then, the industry has suffered other setbacks, so that despite global trade having largely recovered, the industry is still suffering from challenges, and facing an uncertain future.

During that same three decade period, two other delivery services underwent technological revolutions. Mail delivery was decimated by email, while CEP (courier, express, parcel) shipping exploded in growth - driven by e-commerce.

Innovations like same day delivery, real time tracking, and instant pricing have since become mainstays.

While containerization, an earlier innovation, was a critical prerequisite to the trade boom, freight remained largely untouched by technological innovation. Since widespread container adoption from the mid-1960s, freight has been a game of scale. Other technological innovations have been scarce. Some general enterprise technologies were adopted - in the form of EDI communication, ERP/TMS systems and warehouse management solutions - but overall these have been cumbersome and slow to roll out. Besides, there was little incentive to automate: business was booming, and freight rates were generally rising. As a result, there is a wide gulf between B2C last mile shipping technology and B2B shipping technology.

Changing an industry is a gradual process, much like turning a container ship. What appears as small changes today, may be precursors to massive shifts in direction. This survey embarked on understanding the perspectives of those at the helm: how are they approaching current challenges, and where they're steering their ships.

And finally the survey set out to assess whether freight is on the brink of a belated tech boom.



#### 1950

<sup>3</sup> WTO (2015)

- <sup>4</sup>Rose George, "90% of Everything" (2013) <sup>5</sup>Drewry (2014)
- <sup>6</sup> World Bank (2014)

## Eroding Margins

The first substantive change logistics providers face is to their bottom line. According to senior freight decision makers, the core freight forwarding components - ocean, air and trucking are significantly less profitable than other business operations.

Fewer senior decision makers expect these services to be profitable (ocean: 44%, air: 54%, trucking: 59%). This contrasts with the industry's value-added services, which over 70% believe to be profitable (Figure 1).

Even more sobering, some senior decision makers believe that at an industry level, the three core services are actually unprofitable. On an industry level, 17% of senior decision makers consider that ocean freight is currently running at a loss, while 11% say air freight is losing money, and 3% see trucking currently unprofitable.

This is a fundamental change. Overcapacity, declining oil prices, raising labor costs and increased competition have shifted market dynamics. As a result, core services are no longer.

#### East-West Freight Rate (\$/TEU) Including Fuel Charges



East-West trade routes include Asia-N. Europe, Asia-Med., trans-Pacific and N. Europe-N. America Source: Drewry Container Forecaster 4Q 2015

growth engines and future profitability is at risk Large forwarders are experienced at managing market dynamics, so in the short to medium term they should skillfully eke out profit margins from air and ocean freight. However, for several years pundits have questioned the long-term sustainability of forwarder business models.<sup>7</sup>

With no end to overcapacity in sight, and a growing modal shift from air to less-profitable ocean shipping,<sup>8</sup> the situation appears chronic.



#### On an industry level, which of the following services will be profitable?

#### Figure 1

#### Moving freight is the least profitable logistics provider service

<sup>7</sup>Roland Berger (2013) <sup>8</sup>JOC (2014)

## **Customer Expectations**

The second key change buffeting the freight industry is changing customer expectations. Customers are demanding more, and this is further exacerbating profitability.

Outstanding customer service is important when business is going well; understanding your customer is absolutely crucial when it's not. This means understanding what shippers are looking for in a third party logistics relationship. Freight senior decision makers rate two factors - reliability and cost - as critical for shippers when selecting providers (Figure 2), while communications, crisis management and a personal relationship rate well behind.

With the exception of improving cost to shippers, the four other factors conventionally require more manpower, adding expense to already tight margins. But with improving cost as the second-highest ranking factor, forwarders are challenged to deliver reliable service without spending more. In effect, this means identifying and eliminating inefficiencies.

And that can create a vicious circle for Forwarders. They must continuously match the value add quality services that competitors offer to stay in the game. Take for example, freight tracking technology. Accurate event information and exception notification started relatively recently as

#### How important are the following IT capabilities to shippers?



Shippers most expect forwarders to have real-time tracking and real-time booking IT capabilities

an expensive value-add that few forwarders could offer and few shippers could afford. Today even small shippers won't ship unless they can check the status of their shipment.

Shippers have a clear idea where providers should start looking. The two IT capabilities shippers most demand are tracking and real-time booking (Figure 3), both of which give customer transparency. The advantage of these are that both can save time (reducing cost) for both forwarders and shippers, while improving service reliability. In short, shippers are expecting logistics providers to find those efficiencies by automating processes. The odd reality is that while forwarders clearly recognize the shippers' desire for an online experience, few have acted to provide it.

#### How critical are the following factors when shippers select providers?



Figure 3

Shippers most value reliability and cost when selecting forwarders

Technology is changing the way forwarders have to serve their customers, but it should also be seen as a way to help forwarders run their businesses more profitably.

> **Eric Johnson,** Research Director & IT Editor American Shipper

#### Behind The Change

Increased IT demands from shippers are a byproduct of changing supply chains and generational differences.

Agile supply chains in an on-demand economy means more frequent shipments and more varied origins and destinations.

Gone are the days when shippers can plan freight movements a year in advance.

Then there is the demographic reality. More and more of today's logistics managers and freight buyers grew up with a smartphone in their hand and take for granted instant access to streaming video, e-commerce shopping and, in general, the world at their fingertips. In the words of a recent study, they *"have used high tech modeling, gaming, and forecasting software most of their young lives"*.<sup>9</sup> Unsuprisingly, they now expect instant service from logistics providers.

Finally, in today's connected world, shippers are empowered with more information. While shipping was once an opaque industry, buyers are now more informed, thanks to improved freight information availability (e.g. price benchmarking, freight tracking technology). These shifting customer expectations are playing out in a number of ways.

#### **Provider Consolidation**

Most forwarders (71%) believe shippers are consolidating the logistics providers they work with (Figure 4). Forwarders who cannot provide improved reliability at lower cost stand to lose the most.

#### Broadly speaking, are shippers consolidating or increasing logistics providers?



Figure 4

## Shippers are consolidating logistics providers

Customers are increasingly demanding transparency and solutions: visibility throughout the quote process, through freight movements, in all aspects of customer service. But tech-ready forwarders can provide a win-win solution.

> **Cathy Morrow Roberson,** Founder and Head Analyst Logistics Trends & Insights

<sup>9</sup> Logistics Management (2015)

#### Shorter contracts

Although 45% experienced no change in the length of contracts, twice as many forwarders reported shorter contract lengths, at 37%, than the 18% that reported longer contract lengths (Figure 5).

# Are current negotiated contracts for longer or shorter periods?

No change 45%

37%

Figure 5

82% of forwarders see contract length getting shorter or not changing

#### More spot rates

Most forwarders are experiencing the same or more spot quotes, compared to tenders (Figure 6). This is unsurprising, given falling rates and because buying patterns are becoming more dynamic.

The result is that customers are increasingly in the driver's seat of the relationship, expecting more service from providers anxious to hold onto their customers.

## Quote vs Tenders: Which of the following are you experiencing?



Figure 6

78% of forwarders are experiencing the same or more spot quotes and fewer tenders



## Emerging Players

The third group of fundamental changes to the industry is the entry of players who are not traditional logistics service providers, specifically carriers and large technology companies.

### Carriers

Along with shippers and forwarders, carriers are active participants in global freight. Forwarders currently manage most air cargo freight movements. Ocean carriers, however, have traditionally sold the majority of their capacity directly to shippers, although that share has been steadily declining and is currently about 60%.<sup>10</sup>

But the rise of online sales may enable both air and ocean carriers to significantly increase direct to shipper sales. In 2015, Delta commenced online cargo freight quoting and booking,<sup>11</sup> while other airlines, such as China Southern and Qatar Airways began to offer direct e-commerce freight pricing.

Most senior freight decision makers (73%) anticipate that direct online carrier sales to shippers will continue, further eating into their market share (Figure 7). In fact, half believe that this online sales trend will expand from air to ocean carriers as well. Shippers will likely flock to online purchasing from carriers to save time, effort and costs. This trend has been reflected in other industries as well, such as airlines providing flight booking direct to passengers.

### Some cargo airliners sell directly to shippers online. Will this continue?

Figure 7

73% think that direct online carrier sales to shippers online will continue in some capacity



### Large Technology Companies

Technology companies with sprawling infrastructure, large captive audiences, and accessible capital have been relentlessly exploring new opportunities. Given the market opportunity, logistics represents a lucrative target for corporate expansion, particularly for E-commerce companies that currently outsource their logistics operations to external providers.

An overwhelming 89% of senior decision makers believed Amazon will make move into the logistics space (Figure 8). It has recently become clear that they are correct; Amazon applied for an NVOCC license in November 2015.<sup>12</sup> True to their modus operendi, this could lead to their eventually offering logistics capabilities as a service.<sup>13</sup> The proof? In a recent SEC filing, Amazon listed under competition "companies that provide fulfillment and logistics services for themselves or for third parties, whether online or offline".<sup>14</sup>

#### Which large tech companies do you think will make a significant move into the logistics space?



Figure 8

## Amazon is the most likely tech company to move into logistics

Amazon is hardly the only technology behemoth with logistics prospects. Over one third of logistics influencers believe Uber has significant potential to move into logistics, while Alibaba's logistics arm, Cainiao, was recently valued at \$7.7 billion dollars,<sup>15</sup> almost double the recent valuation of the world's largest forwarder, DHL's Global Forwarding.<sup>16</sup>

Both carriers and technology players are leveraging technology to make processes more efficient, spelling out new demands and standards for the world of freight.

> Logistics companies are looking at the likes of Amazon and Uber with trepidation. Parts of the logistics industry are inefficient and ripe for disruption. New technologies and business models are needed to transform global, regional and national trading networks.

> > John Manners-Bell, Chief Executive Transport Intelligence

#### Key Industry Changes: A Recap

The survey results identified three broad changes, and a common theme of automation.

- ① The core services of global forwarding are no longer driving growth.
- (2) Customers are expecting forwarders to automate services and provide transparency.
- ③ Automation is powering growth for emerging players.

<sup>12</sup>Reuters (2016)

<sup>13</sup>TechCrunch (2016)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup>United States Securities and Exchange Commission (2016)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup>TechCrunch (2016)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup>The Loadstar (2016)

## Why Decision Makers Remain Confident

The international freight industry had been growing regularly for decades. But the last five years have been jarring for the entrenched players.

However, senior logistics decision makers remain confident about the role logistics providers will play over the next five years (Figure 9). Over 60% believe that they will play an expanded role in five years time, while 18% believe they will hold their existing market share. By contrast, only 2% are concerned that commoditization will result in their service offering contracting to little more than NVOCC and customs brokerage services, rather than the comprehensive value-added services generally offered. This optimism should be predicated on a confidence that they can overcome current problems. And it turns out that they do in fact have that confidence, as well as a pretty clear idea on what lies ahead.



## What role will freight forwarders play in five years?

81% think that forwarders will play a similar or expanded role five years from now





## Select 3 most practical methods forwarders can adopt to help combat yield dilution

Senior decision makers are confident that eroding margins are controllable. When asked to select the three most practical method for forwarders to combat yield dilution (Figure 10), a resounding 86% chose technology.

After technology, 63% said that new service offerings will help forwarders navigate the future. In a notoriously conservative industry, opting for proven value-added services over technology would have been the safe option. However, the predominance of selecting technology indicates a changing tide within the industry.

It's easy to understand, though, why new service offerings is a preferred method combat yield

dilution. Profit margins in air, trucking and ocean are diminishing, while additional services, such as contract logistics, are perceived to be far more profitable.

The only other popular preferred option for combating margin erosion was through growth. Either by organic growth or through mergers and acquisitions (M&As). Interestingly enough, while the focus in 2015 was very much on M&As, only 50% of senior freight professionals see it as the ideal way to improve their industry position.

The following sections consider each of the top three methods in turn.



## Leveraging Technology

Nearly 90% of forwarders believe that technology will secure their future. On a broad level, technological change is transforming organizations in nearly every industry, from hotels and taxis to farming. However, while the industry's complexity and opacity may have prevented technology from reaching freight for years, there has been a recent surge in technological innovation and adoption.

And while logistics providers, and presumably carriers, are attracted to "Big Data" technology, other players are also excited by the potential benefits.

As supply chains grow increasingly complex, shipper technology has kept manufacturing costs down and improved supply chain agility. Apple Inc, led by CEO Tim Cook, has been a prime example of how companies can drive down supply chain costs with relentless focus.<sup>17</sup> But with carrier/forwarder relationships frequently functioning as a bottleneck for otherwise optimized supply chains, shippers are now expecting improved visibility, pricing and routing.

Another new force is driving change in the industry. Venture capital funds have turned their sights to the logistics market. For many investors this is quite a change from their previous focus on consumer internet technologies, such as social networks. Nonetheless, investments in logistics has exploded, with \$1.5 billion dollars of investments in 2015 alone.<sup>18</sup> As a result the tech media covered freight far more in 2015 than in any prior year.<sup>19</sup>

Market need and available funding has driven an increase in logistics startups. Online domestic platforms, like Cargomatic and Convoy, have proliferated, attempting to replicate sharing economy successes from other industries. Similarly, there are container technology startups; including collapsible hardware (Staxxon), a marketplace for empty shipping containers (BCG's xChange), and sea-vessel utilisation (ClearMetal). Big-data analytics is also a prime focus, including pricing (Xeneta), real-time reporting on shipments (Traxens) and ocean shipping visibility (Windward).

Cargo has moved in boxes - containers - since the middle of the last century and will continue to do so in this century. But that doesn't mean that data needs to be sent using 20th century technologies like fax and email. Real efficiencies can be gained from using the Internet and accumulating data with new "Big Data" technologies in the cloud.

> Zvi Schreiber, CEO Freightos

<sup>17</sup>Apple Insider (2011)
<sup>18</sup>KPMG (2016)
<sup>19</sup>Freightos (2015)

### The Disruption Bluff

While hardware technology like drones and 3D printing frequently grab headlines, senior decision makers aren't necessarily convinced of their short-term relevance. Of the commonly referenced innovative logistics hardware, warehouse robotics are the only innovation that a majority consider will have a profound impact on the industry (Figure 11).

While the vast majority of forwarders agree technology is the future of freight, they see many types of technology as over-hyped. Less than 50% believe 3D printers will have a profound impact on freight, only 32% believe that aerial drones and unmanned trucks will significantly impact freight, and just 8% see a future in augmented reality.

That's not to say that these incredibly impressive technologies won't play a fundamental role in 30 years time or solve niche needs elsewhere in the more immediate future. Maersk, for instance, recently completed the first vessel delivery by drone.<sup>20</sup> However, it seems that the hardware that drives the bulk of world trade will not fundamentally change in the near future.

#### Which two of the following innovations will have a profound impact on the industry?



Figure 11

Only warehouse robotics and 3D printers will have a profound impact on the industry

## So What Technology Is The Future Of Freight?

The vehicles moving goods may not change, but forwarders are focusing on revamping the technology that moves information.

To differentiate by providing excellent service, spending less on customer acquisition and reducing errors, some of the world's largest providers are moving towards technology that streamlines internal operations, optimises freight movements, and improves customer connectivity. Companies like Hellmann, CEVA Logistics, Nippon Express and Kuehne+Nagel are automating aspects of freight pricing, routing and sales.

In this respect, domestic trucking, especially in the United States, is ahead of the curve, utilising data technology - like APIs for computer-to-computer rating, cargo optimisation and last mile delivery. In some cases, forwarders are opting for acquisitions to get up to speed. For instance, in 2015, C.H. Robinson acquired online freight truck broker, Freightquote for \$365 million.<sup>21</sup>

### Data Visibility

Better TMS systems, improved auditing and global visibility systems are all priorities for logistics providers looking to reduce costs. According to Mr. Joeri Kuik, the Global Head of DHL Lead Logistics Partner and Chief Innovation Officer, *"Everyone has their own information system, their own information*  ... and we know information is important. So we keep it to ourselves." But Kuik stressed that the movement of information needs to improve, both internally and outside of organizations.<sup>22</sup> If the vehicles won't change, at the very least the data that directs the vehicles should.

### Online Sales Platforms

One of the most interesting developments in freight technology has been the emergence of online sales platforms connecting players across the freight supply chain. And the changing environment means that yesterday's threats are today's opportunities. When senior business professionals were asked for their stance on online pricing platforms like the Freightos Marketplace, 86% of senior decision makers either saw them as an opportunity or were neutral to it, with over half bullish on the prospects of online sales (Figure 12).

## Online platforms where forwarders can offer online pricing to shippers have started to emerge. How much of a threat do you see this?



Figure 12

62% of forwarders see online freight sales platforms as an opportunity, while only 15% identify them as a threat

## Value-Add Service Offerings

Next after leveraging technology to drive efficiency and reduce costs, comes developing new service offerings. 63% of senior decision makers believe that this will counteract yield dilution.

Given that value-added services, like contract logistics, are seen to be more profitable than core services (Figure 1) it is surprising that this 'safe' option didn't poll highest. Perhaps this option rated lower because many top forwarders have already exhausted this opportunity, and even value-added services are becoming highly competitive. Only a minority of senior decision makers (40%) selected a similar option - expand service offerings by managing outsourced logistics or managing full supply chains. This option finds value moving up the shipping management chain, rather than across the supply chain. But even though Transportation Management is currently rated as a profitable service, the majority of senior decision makers do not see sufficient potential in this option to help them escape margin erosion.

## Growth (Organic and M&As)

Tracking industry trends, there is no doubt that M&As were on the minds of freight executives in 2015. Total deal value of M&As in 2015 rocketed up to \$172.7 billion, up from \$87 billion in 2014. The average deal value doubled, growing from \$376 million in 2014 to \$771 million in 2015.<sup>23</sup> This momentum continued into 2016, with rumors of a possible acquisition of DHL Global Forwarding by Japan Post, coming only months after the Asian giant had acquired Toll Holdings.<sup>24</sup>

Pundits attribute the M&A spike to players expanding into new markets with new services, broadening strengths, and getting 'asset right' (abandoning an asset light strategy and taking on assets as a hedge). But judging from the third place ranking of growth as a method to stay ahead, not all senior decision makers are convinced. Only 50% selected this option as a method to combat yield dilution. Skepticism into the efficacy of mergers on a broader basis is well-founded; research has shown that 50-80% of all mergers fail.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, the high cost and prolonged process to acquire ripe targets, likely render other solutions more attractive.

Uncertainities with international trade, and typically high customer acquisition cost, could also explain reticence to support organic growth as a way out of yield erosion.

## <sup>23</sup>Freightos (2015) <sup>24</sup>Reuters (2016) <sup>25</sup>Wharton University Of Pennsylvania (2005)

# The Future? Data Not Hardware

Three broad changes in the freight industry spell out an uncertain future. The core services of global forwarding are no longer driving growth. Also, customers are demanding that forwarders provide more services with more transparency at lower cost. Finally, carriers and large technology companies, both of whom are emerging as dominant players in the logistics industry, are leveraging technology to improve their position.

But despite these challenges, freight senior decision makers remain optimistic. They are turning to technology as an engine of growth, anticipating that freight's technology boom has arrived. In the meantime venture capitalists and start-ups have discovered the freight industry, and Internet giants like Amazon and Alibaba are also making their moves.

For real impact, though, look beyond the hyped hardware technologies. The core infrastructure required to move freight - containers, planes and trucks - is not fundamentally changing. Improving the data movement that guides freight movement is seen as key to increasing efficiency.

Global forwarders facilitate the international economy by providing physical connectivity - trade lines that span the world. They are now championing a new connectivity - piping information around the globe, bridging the technology gap, achieving better internal operations and improving customer experience. Industry visionaries are increasingly turning to data technology, such as online sales platforms and enhanced visibility capabilities, to bring about the new future of freight.

It's true that it takes a long time for industries such as freight to change. But this year our survey finds evidence that freight's senior business leaders are finally gearing up to adopt new technologies for automating freight sales. 2016 will be the year where freight finally goes online.

> Zvi Schreiber, CEO Freightos

# About Freightos

Freightos® is making international trade frictionless, by bringing the trillion dollar global freight industry online. The Freightos Marketplace, currently in beta, gives importers and exporters instant transparent access to the best global freight services, making shipping cargo as easy as booking a passenger flight. Behind the scenes, Freightos AcceleRate<sup>™</sup> software-as-a-service automates the complex tasks of freight rate management, routing and pricing, and business intelligence.

With Freightos, leading freight forwarders, carriers and shippers automate thousands of price quotes each week, including complex door-to-door quotes combining ocean, air, and land shipping. In the meantime forwarders not using Freightos take an average of over 90 hours to quote a price. Notable customers of Freightos include top twenty global 3PLs like Hellmann Worldwide Logistics, CEVA Logistics, and Nippon Express, as well as Fortune 100 companies, such as Sysco. In order to support its customers, Freightos collects a "Big Data" asset of millions of price points per month.

Ventured-backed, Freightos is registered in Hong Kong with a highly experienced team of over one hundred software and technology experts across offices in the Middle East, Asia, Europe and the US.

Freightos is regularly featured as a thought leader in prestigious media, including Reuters, Bloomberg, Techcrunch and the Wall Street Journal; and in industry research, such as Gartner, Frost & Sullivan and KPMG.

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21