



SHIPPING Network

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Make time to put the face to the name

Carly Fields finds that face-to-face networking is very much alive and kicking in the 21st century



Carly Fields

Networking: it's a word that can whip up cold sweats and sleepless nights for some while others thrive on the opportunity to reach out to new contacts and acquaintances. It's also a word that some smart folk thought would be assigned to the history books as modern day technology took hold and people turned to their tablet or smartphone, negating the need for face-to-face meetings.

● Topic: Youth

I Keywords: events, face time, relationships

Background: Screen time cannot replace face-to-face time in the relationship-heavy world of shipping

In shipping, there were the 'seers' who envisaged an industry where everything could be done virtually. Indeed there are still companies today wishing that could be the case so that they can slash travel budgets and save money. But while as an industry we may have become more discerning about the networking we undertake – perhaps turning down the proverbial letter opening now – there is no denying that networking is still an important facet of this industry. And like it or not, it is here to stay for the foreseeable future.

Young shipping professionals fly the flag for networking, celebrating the vigour of youth and proving that a tech-savvy generation cannot find everything needed for a successful career in shipping on a smartphone.

Speaking to the *Shipping Network*, the Baltic Exchange's Crispin Eccleston, responsible for the Young Baltic Association, believes that networking today carries more impact because it happens less frequently. "I've heard of junior brokers stopped from travelling to events to save cost. In highly competitive markets you can understand the budget concern, but the danger of missing a chance to get to know your clients or finding out how they like to do business is clearly detrimental – ask any principal.

BUSINESS IS RELATIONSHIPS

"When I started out looking for a job, a senior broker drilled into me that 'business is relationships'; in no other industry is



The YBA hosts five parties in Asia every year

this mantra more vital than shipping today. A generation of the Baltic with its bars and restaurants created a daily environment for building your network with 3,000 other members before traditional trading floors were wiped off the face of London. Today, with modern communications and the shift East to chartering authority, the spread of shipping people is far wider, making networking more tricky.



"There's a new generation coming into the industry which is used to living online, so perhaps more digitised networking is somewhere on the horizon but it certainly won't replace 'real' relationships,"
Crispin Eccleston, YBA

"However, if you make the effort you do stand out; if we hold a party in Shanghai, Singapore, London or any shipping hub, you will, without fail, overhear people 'finally' getting to meet, perhaps having tried to fix together through instant messenger (IM) or on the phone for months. Hearing the flow of information into the Baltic, it's always great to see

fixture done with people you know made the connection, 'finally' getting to know each other at a YBA event."

Young Professionals in Shipping Hong Kong (YPSN) co-founder Tabitha Logan agrees that face-to-face networking is still very much alive in shipping: "In our view, face-to-face networking is even more important than it was a generation ago. The idea behind YPSN was to provide a relaxed platform for our members to network and develop their own business relationships. Its success has proved the value this generation still place on face time. With the advent of email and social media, it's easy to see how people may believe face-to-face networking has had its time. However, shipping is and, we believe, will remain for some time, a face-to-face industry. We believe the value of personal contact will never be replicated by other methods of communication."

In Ms Logan's view, face-to-face contact allows for strengthening business ties in an international market; a better environment for brokering and negotiating deals as well as in solving complex problems; creating new strategies which are often better developed with everyone round the same table and with the ability to read each other's body language; and putting a face to the name. "Setting up a personal meeting shows you have taken the time and initiative to developing this relationship," she says.

MEETING PLACE

Founded in 2010, YPSN Hong Kong has grown from an informal social gathering of friends and colleagues into an incorporated non-profit association, holding events attracting over 200 attendees. It aims to provide a forum for young professionals to network and interact with their peers within the industry and to promote the shipping industry as an exciting and viable career path for the next generation.

Its membership has grown year-on-year and it has developed a strong name for itself within the industry. Every year, YPSN runs four seasonal networking events, one to two seminars relating to maritime issues, an education workshop promoting careers in the industry – at the Hong Kong Maritime Museum – and one sporting event, The Pacific Basin Soccer Sixes.

It is approached by a number of organisations each year asking it to co-host and organise or put on YPSN events, such as the China Maritime Conference and the Asia Maritime and Logistics Week. YPSN was also invited to go to Posidonia and on a London roadshow promoting the maritime industry in Hong Kong.

Back in London, Mr Eccleston believes that there is no obvious replacement for face-to-face networking. "What does the same job: Skype or IM?" he asks. "If it weren't for the current oil plummet you might factor in the ever-increasing cost of travel but in the shorter term there's no chance of networking face-to-face becoming redundant. Firstly, and unlike many other industries where a bleary-eyed breakfast coffee with eggs is as good as it gets, in shipping networking is

Networking as far as the eye can see

The shipping industry is lucky enough to have a wealth of networking organisations for young professionals, wherever they might be based.

In China, Young Professionals in Shipping Network PRC was founded in Shanghai in 2012. It holds sponsored social events on a quarterly basis, in a relaxed environment where shipping peers enjoy creating friendships, enhancing knowledge of the business/industry, and developing future business opportunities.

YoungShip has a longer history, having been founded in 2004 in Bergen, Norway. Today, its global network counts more than 2,500 individual members in Oslo, Møre, Haugesund, Stavanger, Kristiansand, Trondheim, Singapore, Cyprus, Dubai, Liverpool, Brazil (Rio) and Mexico. It also has sister organisations in Greece, New York, London, Australia and Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, the Shipping Professional Network in London (SPNL) was founded in 2007 as a meeting place for young shipping professionals in London. It has a membership of over 1,000 and holds regular events in London. Through the Shipping Professional Network International, SPNL is connected with other UK regions, Copenhagen and Hamburg.

To find out more visit ypsnprc.com, youngship.com, or spnl.co.uk. **SN**

fun which creates a natural incentive. Second, good personal networkers fix more ships.

"In the past, companies have tried to digitise fixtures, putting them on screens matching cargoes with ships, but it's never taken off and the reason is that principals rely on relationships. There's certainly benefit from negotiating through an intermediary and principals are reassured by the broker's view on the wider market too, but most importantly it's the reliability; a good broker spots pitfalls and this trust grows from getting to know one another personally."

Ms Logan adds that technology can assist faster and more efficient business in a constantly changing environment: "A ship opens on a market. You send an email and you may fix her on subs almost instantaneously. However, technology is no replacement for personal relationships. When a problem arises, it is the relationship which you have with your counterpart



YPSN hosts the Pacific Basin Soccer Sixes

that helps mediate/fix the problem. Hardly ever is technology the factor that resolves a problem."

FUTURE CHANGE

Mr Eccleston is, however, open to the idea that this may change in the future. "A well seasoned capesize broker told me how he let his daughter have friends over for her birthday last summer. He bought some alcopops and waited for the chaos. Being a middle-aged rocker, he was pretty devastated when they sat round in groups staring at iPads and Blackberrys missing their chance to party 'properly'.

"There's a new generation coming into the industry which is used to living online, so perhaps more digitised networking is somewhere on the horizon but it certainly won't replace 'real' relationships, at least not until the youngsters take charge of the chartering desks."

For its part, the Young Baltic Association hosts four major events for about 200 people in London, two big parties in Shanghai and about three in Singapore every year. Last year it made plans to join the Copenhagen party scene with its first YBA there, but ran out of time before December struck.

"There's always plenty of banter about who's moving where and aside from setting up a second Asia office ourselves based in Shanghai, we've seen a fair few YBA stalwarts heading East in recent months either to setup or support their offices there. After relocating, having a YBA night to head to is a great way to get in with the local shipping crowd and in coming months we'll be looking to do more in Asia. This includes the launch of branches of our sports clubs which thrive and have really tight groups in the UK."

Outside of this, a number of smaller get-togethers are held on the first Thursday of every month in the Baltic bar in London. Generally the numbers attending



"The value of personal contact will never be replicated by other methods of communication,"
Tabitha Logan,
YPSN Hong Kong

have not changed much over my time. "Essentially," says Mr Eccleston, "if you put on a good night, shipping people will come."

Looking to the future, young shipping professionals offer up a mixed bag of opinions on the direction of the industry.

"We're seeing some serious consolidation on the London broking scene with ACM Braemar, Maersk-Lightship, ICAP joining Howe Robinson and Clarksons buying out RS Platou in the biggest broker-takeover ever seen, to name just some," says Mr Eccleston. "Although it's painful in the short term for many members, positioning like this hopefully suggests companies buying at the bottom with the long game in mind, so hopefully there's reason for optimism."

WHAT GOES AROUND

"I've been told twice in the past week by non-Young Baltic Association members that shipping has an uncanny way of always surprising you; this is reassuring for those that have seen the cycle once, twice or more but for our guys, who are under 35, these are pretty unsettling times. The key focus is always to take care of your counterparties and if you can get close to a piece of business in this market, you'll be in a great position when things pick up."

Ms Logan adds that while there's not much optimism for the near future given the oversupply issue, with over 90% of world trade still being transported by shipping, it is difficult not to be optimistic about the future.

"The industry is here to stay and often there are business opportunities to be seized in a downturn market. In this regard, personal relationships are key to building a sustainable career in this industry."

"Like any other industry though, the next generation will have to adapt to suit changing business environments and trends." **SN**

For more information on Young Professionals in Shipping Hong Kong please go to www.ypsnhk.com. For more information on the Young Baltic Association, please contact Crispin Eccleston on +44 (0)20 7369 1654 or ceccleston@balticexchange.com.



Personal contact takes some beating in the shipping world