



## Making Regulatory Compliance a Competitive Advantage

For Atlantic Overseas Express, the company mission statement is a daily guide for providing service from their offices in the US and Colombia. Complying with requirements is a priority and the bedrock of their best practices.

*We don't compete on price; there will always be someone cheaper than us. We can surpass low prices with true customer service, full regulatory compliance, and intimate familiarity with domestic and international regulations and practices.*

Lourdes Leon, owner, Atlantic Overseas Express



## At a Glance

**Atlantic Overseas Express**  
www.atlanticoverseasexpress.com

**Industry**  
Freight forwarder

**Solution**  
Magaya Cargo System, Magaya AES,  
Custom LiveTrack

Freight forwarder Atlantic Overseas Express (AOE) has offices in Miami, Bogota and Medellin. They are C-TPAT (Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism) certified and licensed by the Federal Maritime Commission. They ship to Latin America via ocean and air, with 50% of their exports from the US going to Colombia, and the other half to the Caribbean. AOE also has clients around the globe, and has experience shipping high priority and project cargo across the globe.

## The Atlantic Overseas Express Vision

For some companies, a mission statement is created and often forgotten. In contrast, Lourdes Leon, the owner of Atlantic Overseas Express, developed a mission statement that accurately captures the character of her company, and guides the mentality and orientation of employees. She ensures that all team members constantly see and revisit the mission statement so that they can always be aware of the “bigger picture” behind their business.

She calls her code of ethics the “Ten Commandments” which includes Integrity, Responsibility, Accountability, Safety, Teamwork, Knowledge, Partnerships, Communication, Loyalty, and Respect. “I wanted to ensure that my business represents these ten core values, and then I had to think about the order to decide which comes first, but they all interact,” she said. “You can’t have one without the other.”

“I also worked on a vision statement that illustrates how we work. While some freight forwarders let the buyer set the rules, I start with meeting US regulations and industry compliance. Then we apply our own business guidelines and best practices. Next we apply the requirements of the shipper, the destination and the consignee. We educate our customers about the procedures, and they really value that. It gives them the confidence that their cargo is being shipped correctly and with minimal risk or liability.”



Since opening Atlantic Overseas Express in 1997, Lourdes has expanded the services they offer while maintaining high standards and the personalized service that is associated with small and medium-

sized businesses. The company ships a variety of goods, with a specialty in temporary exports for the entertainment industry such as light and sound equipment for live performances in Latin America and the Caribbean.

To ensure regulations are followed and quality service levels are maintained, she evaluates every step of the process before shipping. “We do a pre-inspection of the site,” she explained. “We analyze the carriers to ensure they have the strengths and capabilities to ship the cargo, and we run through a checklist to make sure we account for every pertinent detail. For example, I ask if anyone packed cigarettes or extra tools in their road cases when shipping into Colombian or Brazil because the customs agencies will confiscate anything that is not specifically documented. All details must be in the Carnet. We have the experience to help our customers avoid delays at Customs and to prevent legal liabilities.”

## From Medical School to Freight Forwarding

When talking about how she got started in the logistics industry, “I was supposed to go into medical school, but I hated organic chemistry.” In her early 20’s, she moved to Miami to be closer to her grandmother while finishing her psychology degree at Barry University in Miami. “But I found that working in the field of psychology was not for me. My parents really wanted me to go to medical school, yet I ended up in the same field that my mother worked in back in Colombia in the 1970s and 80s.”



Lourdes's mother was the agent for all shipping lines in San Andres Island. The family decided to leave the country due to the unfavorable security conditions in Colombia, and the better prospects for furthering education and launching a small business in the United States.

After college in the 1980s, Lourdes worked in Miami in equipment control, tracking shipping containers, on paper cards. Then she worked for another company, filling in SEDs, and the old Consular Certificates and all required export documentation. She gained additional experience working at a few other freight forwarding companies over a few years, and then she decided to open her own company with encouragement from former colleagues and her husband, Jorge. "He is an invisible partner and my biggest supporter. I have my mom's background and my husband's immeasurable support," she said.

When she opened her business, Lourdes selected office space that happened to be in the same building that Magaya started its business in. "I go back a long, long way with Magaya," she said. "I had a small office with two desks and a Brother typewriter to cut air waybills." Today she has a new warehouse and office in Miami, not far from the original office but firmly founded on the ethics in her Ten Commandments.

## Everything is Done by the Book to Ensure Quality

Lourdes discussed how she and her staff stay up to date on regulations and how that helps her company compete. "We keep up on industry regulations by participating in the Customs Brokers Association meetings and workshops, industry updates and seminars and we have the licenses and insurance necessary to conduct our job responsibly. We also notice that Magaya is also up to date on regulations, allowing me to trust Magaya."

Lourdes not only relies on the software for compliance, but she says it's her disaster recovery plan: "The last time there was a hurricane, the office was shut down for four days, but it didn't affect business because I can log in from anywhere and there is no difference for our customers. Magaya's interface is easy to use from anywhere in the world, which gives me flexibility for my travel schedule."

Atlantic Overseas Express evaluates the projects that customers bring them to understand what is required. "We research customers first to ensure they are a type of customer we want to work with so we can ensure we can meet their needs well," Lourdes explained. "Another way we maintain our quality is to work only with partners who are equally committed to quality and professionalism."

Another example of how the standards have paid off for Atlantic

Overseas Express is illustrated by a story Lourdes told about an audit conducted by the electronics company HP. When HP and Compaq were merging, HP sent representatives to freight forwarders that both companies worked with to evaluate the shipping processes of each company and decide which to keep.

"When the rep called, I happened to answer the phone," Lourdes said. "The rep said she was calling to say hello to one of my employees who handled the HP documentation, but the rep said she was not coming to visit the facility to perform the audit." When Lourdes asked her why, the rep said she had seen a few offices and warehouses already and was so disappointed at the lack of organization that she couldn't face another one. "I convinced her to come see us, and we pulled up all the data she asked about in minutes. When the rep asked me how we could be so organized since Atlantic Overseas Express is such a small business, I told her that it hadn't been for Magaya, we wouldn't have been able to find the information so fast. That saved us."

That audit came after Atlantic Overseas Express had been in business for a few years. At first, she admits she and her staff were not using all the features in the software. "We started out basically using it as a typewriter until our Magaya representative visited and delivered the training that we needed," she said.

Now they use the software for all their operations. "I like the flow of the information from the Quote to the Pickup to a Booking to a Shipment and Loading and issuing labels – it's fantastic."

"I also use the online tracking, especially the courier air waybill so our customers can see them online, and I include the FedEx number. We include photographs of arriving cargo. Then we add attachments to the shipment of the documents they send to us. The documents are available for the customer to see online on LiveTrack. Our customers love LiveTrack," she said. "They see the latest updates of their inventory at any time."

## Shipping 101 for Dummies

Atlantic Overseas Express has offices Bogota and Medellin, Colombia, which also use Magaya software. "We send the shipment transactions to them through the Magaya system. It makes the Arrival Notices fast and efficient," Lourdes said.

"I recommend Magaya software to my agents because it is so easy to use. It is intuitive and very organized," she said. "I appreciate guidebooks and manuals that are clear and to the point. When I looked at Magaya, it was easy to see where to go to make an air shipment because there is an airplane on the button. To make an ocean shipment, click the ship. It's so easy."

“When I chose the software, I liked the fact that Magaya was a young company. I learned that WTDC (a Miami warehousing and distribution company) was also using the software and endorsing it, and I figured WTDC would push Magaya to be the best software and then I could benefit from it. I wanted a software that is user friendly, adaptable, ever evolving - which you have been -, and that I could recommend to others.”

They use the software to keep all the documents for a transaction in one place: “We save security endorsements, power of attorney, credit applications – we store all the documents in the system as attachments, so I can find them when the TSA or other agency asks me. It makes it easy. The paper document isn’t in some folder someplace where you might have difficulty in accessing it.”

Competition in the logistics industry is steep but multifaceted. “We don’t compete on price; there will always be someone cheaper than us. Many freight forwarders are cookie cutters that try to compete on price. I am not a cookie cutter. We provide a competitive market price that comes with true customer service, attention to unique customer needs, and an intimate familiarity with the rules and practices of the industry” she said. “We are thankful to partners like Magaya, who help guarantee that we deliver on promises to our customers.”

