CASE STUDY:

Trico Maritime International USA

Logistics Provider



Connecting with Small Businesses: Community Service and Building Relationships

Trico Maritime International USA began as a small business serving Sri Lankans who are living, working or traveling in the U.S. and need to ship items back home. Now Trico also imports and exports to and from its Los Angeles office using the Magaya Cargo System for consolidations, warehousing and more.

I really enjoy this business and my service for the Chamber of Commerce.

Rohan Sourjah, owner, Trico Maritime International USA

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Logistics Software Solutions

At a Glance

Trico Maritime International USA
www.tricomaritimeusa.com
Industry
Logistics Provider
Solution
Magaya Cargo System

Trico Maritime International USA is an NVOCC based in Los Angeles, California. Acting as an independent agent for Trico Maritime Global whose head office is located in Sri Lanka, Trico USA specializes in exports from LA to Sri Lanka, but also handles consolidations to the Middle East, Australia and other destinations.

Introduction

The challenges small freight forwarders face include competition from larger companies who have volume pricing and priority space on carriers. One way to overcome these challenges is to be willing to work with small shippers or startups and give them personal attention; that's the philosophy of Trico Maritime International USA owner Rohan Sourjah.

Mr. Sourjah believes in building relationships with customers and in the community. As a small NVOCC, he has to keep costs in check so he takes advantage of technology and social media tools to reach out to his customers and prospects. "One of the reasons I selected the Magaya Cargo System was for it affordable price, but I like how flexible the system is. I can jump in at any point in the shipping process, either from a quote, receiving cargo, or creating a bill of lading without the mandatory requirements of other software programs and the cost. It takes the IT problems off my hands, so I can concentrate on my preferences, which is to serve my customers."

Shipping to and from Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is an island country south of India that was formerly known as Ceylon. The mostly commonly exported commodities from Sri Lanka include woven and knit apparel, rubber, sapphires, tea and spices.

Languages spoken in Sri Lanka include Sinhala and Tamil, but English is commonly used in government and business in urban areas such as the capital city of Colombo. Transportation services in the city include the Bandaranaike International Airport and a deepwater port. Trains transport coffee and tea from the hill country to Colombo for export.



Cargo airlines that serve Sri Lanka include Cathay Pacific, MASkargo of Malaysia, Qatar Airways Cargo, and SriLankan Cargo.

Mr. Sourjah moved to the U.S. in 1998 from Sri Lanka. He worked as a specialty sales manager overlooking special orders and installations at Home Depot where he said he learned a lot about customer service. He moved to Los Angeles because he has family and friends in the area. New York and Los Angeles have the largest communities of Sri Lankan Americans.

He got started in shipping with the help of a friend. "I had a friend on the East Coast who had a shipping company, which gave me the idea of getting into this business. I knew there was a large community of ex-patriot Sri Lankans in the U.S., so in 2007 I started shipping personal cargo also called 'Unaccompanied Personal Baggage' as an agent for Trico. They are well known in Sri Lanka, and they serve many shipping needs, including for Sri Lankans who are living, working, visiting overseas and need to ship items home. Other customers start a business and others including startups and small businesses who ships LCLs of sample shipments. By being a part of Trico, I can take advantage of the network of agents they have," he said.

Since then Mr. Sourjah has expanded the shipping he provides by booking containers with carriers to ship cars and other vehicles and consolidation to Sri Lanka of household goods and personal effects. He also ships LCL to Australia and Singapore, mostly via ocean. He also arranges overland transportation within the U.S. and door-to-door in Sri Lanka. He works with a clearing agent in Sri Lanka who handles all the import regulations for cargo and clears it for distribution.

Connecting with Small Businesses

Since he runs a small business, Mr. Sourjah knows the challenges that others face when they're getting started. He talked about one of his customers, a nutrition company, as an example: "I handled some shipping for a small startup company in Sri Lanka that imports nutritional supplements. They needed help with their paperwork due to the language differences and getting into trade shows here in the U.S., so I wrote some letters on their behalf. I built the relationship with them when they were small and now they have more regular shipments."

"As a small company, I am willing to take on more difficult imports and exports than larger freight forwarders," he said. "They cannot offer the service that I offer. Any of my customers can pick up the phone and call me even at night, and I will answer. I keep in touch via phone, Skype, or email. I'm also a strong believer in social media. A lot of my customers use my Facebook page where I post shipment dates and cut-off times. I also invite many Sri Lankans to my page, especially people who live in the Los Angeles area."

Community Service

In January 2014 Mr. Sourjah was presented with a "Volunteer of the Year" award by the Harbor City Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Sourjah has been on the board of the Chamber for three years and is currently chairperson of the chamber's International Trade Committee, a new committee he helped form. "I really enjoy this business and my service for the Chamber of Commerce," he said.



Other projects Mr. Sourjah is involved with help students in the U.S. and in Sri Lanka. One project raises scholarship funds for students in Sri Lanka. He is also supportive of the local schools such as the Port of Los Angeles High School, which has a logistics and port operations program and included Magaya software in the program in 2013 as part of the curriculum. "I am looking forward to the first batch of graduates," he said.

Software as a Buffet

When Mr. Sourjah started his business, he used spreadsheets as many freight forwarders do. He also outsourced some work to a company in India that produced all the documentation but soon changed his mind. "I didn't like giving all my information to a third party to process. I didn't like not knowing what was happening, so I went back to keeping spreadsheets myself and started looking for logistics software," he said.

In addition to evaluating software, he moved his business into a warehouse in Harbor City. He also stores cargo and inventory for customers in a warehouse in Freemont - San Francisco. He needed to keep track of all the items, no matter which warehouse they were in.

"I looked at software from various companies, and they were very expensive and they did not respond to my request for information right away; the customer service wasn't good. Then I found Magaya, and the Logistics Management Advisor, James Ung, gave me an enthusiastic demonstration of the software."



"The nice thing about Magaya software is it doesn't matter if you are a warehouse provider, an NVOCC, or a freight forwarder," he said. "From accepting cargo or just do a bill of lading, I can create the documents. You don't have to go through a long chain of events."

"The software fits the type of business I'm in. It's flexible and user friendly. I add rates into Quotes. I can integrate my logo and more. It is fun to use," he said. "One of my employees also loves playing around and experimenting with the system. Whenever we have a question, we just call James and he helps us out."

"You take the problem off the shipping company's hands," he said. "I don't have to waste time. The software has everything I need. As I add more services, I learn about the software features that are available to me. It's like having a buffet to choose from."

Trico Maritime USA has moved into a new warehouse that includes the warehouse and office in Torrance, CA. Trico also has a presence in San Francisco and Seattle. "I hope to have a branch in every neighboring state," he said.

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