

## CUSTOMS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE COMPLIANCE FORUM

**W**elcome to the brave new world of international goods movements! As predicted, the demand for customs knowledge in the transport and logistics sector and amongst importers and exporters has reached dizzying heights with unrestrained attempts at poaching and the opportunity to almost write your own salary. Job opportunities have arisen all over the UK, which is excellent news.

However, not so great news is the very obvious fact that a very large number of importers and exporters large and small have managed to ignore all communications and have done no preparation whatsoever, have no idea at all about customs matters and believe that just phoning a freight agent, haulier or fast parcels carrier will see all their issues go away. This, of course, can never be true, as legal liability remains with the importers and exporters and they are supposed to instruct their agents – not the other way around. This brings with it further opportunities for new business not just with new clients, but also with new services, so long as you have the knowledge to pass along.

Sadly, some transport and logistics companies have found it all too hard and have reduced their services, sometimes temporarily and sometimes permanently. There is no doubt that dealing with new requirements on behalf of demanding new clients who have no clue is difficult, time-consuming and stressful.

However, despite everything, the total end-of-the-world disaster that some predicted has not as yet happened, which is in many ways thanks to the dedicated hard work of our members and others in the sector. The government has issued a new grant scheme for importers and exporters from and to the EU with up to £2,000 per company available for consultancy and training – a welcome addition that it is hoped will lead to a better-educated sector, which in turn will smooth the path of their goods' movements and ease the frayed nerves of their transport and logistics providers.

Do not forget that if you are working on behalf of a non-UK company, even if that company has a GB EORI and a GB VAT number, you, the freight agent/haulier, will become the declarant for customs matters and will have no choice but to work on



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Indirect Customs Agent (Indirect Representation) terms. Should there be any difficulty, you will in effect be solely liable for non-compliance, import duty, VAT and penalties.

CILT has long been an advocate of training as a way to improve business efficiency, improve members prospects and, dare I say it, increase job satisfaction, so do not forget to look at the courses offered and take advantage of this brave new world where customs professionals have finally found not only the glare of the spotlight, but also the recognition they deserve.

**Susan Morley FCILT**

Chair, Customs and International Trade Compliance Forum.

## WAREHOUSE TECHNOLOGY & MATERIALS HANDLING FORUM

### Automating movement within the warehouse

**T**he Forum hosted its first online event since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Forum Chair Martin Brickell introduced the event and speakers whilst Ana Walker acted as host and event administrator.

This event was focused on autonomous intelligent robots (AIV/AMRs). Technology has moved on some way from the days of automated guided vehicles (AGVs) that can only operate on a fixed, pre-laid path or track. Modern AIVs and equivalents use mapping and a variety of sensors to self-navigate from start point to destination, using a map of the desired route and local environment that is loaded during initial deployment. AIVs from different suppliers can pick up, transport and drop goods, pallets or containers using a variety of different approaches and solutions.

We were fortunate to have speakers with serious knowledge and experience in this area, to share some key technologies and insight for anyone thinking of possible AIV/AMR deployment into their operation. From Jonathan van Den Dool, Eurogroep,

and Nigel Lahiri, GreyOrange, we learned about current challenges and conditions in the UK warehouse and distribution sector:

- **Space** – lowest warehouse vacancy rate since 2000, at 4–7%
- **Pace** – the age of immediate commerce, with 95%+ of consumers equating fast delivery with same day and many now expecting next day as standard
- **People** – a labour crunch with many warehouse operations struggling to fill all vacancies

Automation in general can be a solution to these challenges with AIV/AMR implementations in particular offering quickly scalable solutions with potentially rapid deployment and fast return on investment. Depending on the original processes employed, pick rate performance increases of 600% are possible, with corresponding efficiency gains and labour cost reduction or avoidance.

Jonathan van Den Dool introduced the Lowpad solution, developed by Eurotec,



▲ The Forum held a recent online event about autonomous intelligent robots

a concept focused on a low height AIV; different versions of the same base technology mean that a wide variety of goods or containers can be handled. The Lowpad is considered a collaborative robot, so integration of the AIVs and people in the same areas is practicable.

Nigel Lahiri discussed the GreyOrange approach, marrying GreyMatter constantly learning AI software to the Ranger series of robots. He also shared key experiences of a recent implementation.

**Mark Hollowell MILT**

Committee Member, Warehouse Technology & Materials Handling Forum.