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THE EFFECTS of the coronavirus pandemic are of such historic and far-reaching proportions that the world will never be the same, even long after it has passed. The 'new normal' has therefore become the current buzzword, referring to lasting changes in how we live, work and consume goods and services. One common element in all of this is digitalisation – the use of digital technologies to change a business model and provide new revenue and value-producing opportunities – and shipping is in the vanguard of this movement.

IT SOLUTIONS IN FIGHT AGAINST PANDEMIC

Every stage of the supply chain has undergone digital transformation over the last few decades. Because shipping and logistics are integral to this process of getting goods from producers to consumers, the Shipping Association of Jamaica (SAJ), its members and industry associates have been exploring and implementing IT solutions to enhance speed, security, business viability and customer satisfaction.

Today, in the showdown with COVID-19, these solutions are also proving to be effective weapons to promote health and safety. Automated logistics-processing systems, such as the Port Community System (PCS), the Automated System for Customs Data, e-payment gateways, digital labour deployment, and other measures already in operation at our ports, have reduced the need for human congestion and physical interaction that are now such crucial factors in the fight against the pandemic.

THE PORT COMMUNITY SYSTEM

The Port Community System (PCS) is a secure electronic platform accessible to private and public stakeholders in the port community.

Since 2016, visits by all cargo vessels to Jamaica have been reported by shipping agents to the Jamaica Customs Agency (JCA) through the PCS. This has resulted in a decreased turnaround time for the completion of trans-shipment bills from 30 minutes to an average of five minutes, while also facilitating 24-hour business transactions.

The PCS utilises a single data-entry platform that allows for the submission of shipping manifests and other key documents to one site, which automatically distributes them to key parties in the logistics chain.

The PCS also manages the submission of less-than-containerload manifests to the JCA, as well as the authorisations from Customs, shipping agents and freight forwarders, container terminals (terminal authorisation), and customs brokers/freight forwarders (trucker identification).

Instead of checking the required physical documents, as was the case before the electronic system, the terminals' gate staff now check their electronic equivalent, made through the PCS computerised system, before allowing cargo to leave the port.

Once payments have been made to the relevant parties and all releases are in place, the PCS then creates a PCS gate-out authorisation notification. This is sent to various stakeholders – such as

truckers, customs brokers/freight forwarders and terminals – to advise that the respective cargo is authorised to be collected.

With regard to exports, the PCS streamlines the integration of processes with Customs and the terminals and utilises best-in-class, intelligent security strategies to collect, store and transmit the industry's data, while protecting it from security breaches of various types and origins.

The PCS allows all industry stakeholders to share information electronically, thus providing outstanding benefits, which include improved security, increased productivity, reduced transportation costs, and now the advantage of avoiding travel, physical contact and the handling of documents during the coronavirus crisis.

AUTOMATED SYSTEMS FOR CUSTOMS DATA (ASYCUDA WORLD)

The Jamaica Customs Agency commenced piloting of the functionalities of its automated system, ASYCUDA World, in December 2014. ASYCUDA World System provides for customs declarations and all supporting documentation to be submitted electronically.

The introduction of the new digital paradigm was accompanied by numerous amendments to the 1941 Customs Act, which allowed for the introduction of a fully electronic system.

ASYCUDA World has significantly transformed the JCA's business processes in several areas, including the submission of manifests and declarations, payment of duties and taxes, and facilitating e-based risk assessment, coordinated inspections, the release of cargo, and performance management and reporting, particularly as it pertains to data retrieval and analysis by the agency.

The ASYCUDA World system is proving to be of great value in the current pandemic, allowing persons to avoid much of the travel, waiting in lines, physical interaction and exchange of hard-copy documents that were all part of the 'old normal'.

SAJ'S TELEPHONE RECRUITING SYSTEM (TRS)

Since 2008, the Shipping Association of Jamaica has been using the ADVANTUM e-Labour TRS that does not require stevedores to congregate at a dispatch hall as currently exists at many ports in the world.

The SAJ employs and manages 340 stevedores who possess varying types of skills and who are deployed electronically to the terminals operating at Port Bustamante each day, using cutting-edge technology provided by ADVANTUM.

The ADVANTUM e-Labour TRS assigns to every stevedore a unique PIN number and personnel number that the system uses to identify their individual skills and other important information. The SAJ's dispatch hall is therefore a virtual place, and the recruiting windows operate online through the TRS. The TRS can assign duties to 26 persons simultaneously, and in one minute 100 workers can be deployed without having to converge in a dispatch hall; therefore, a major health risk has been averted.

PORT TERMINALS – KWL AND KFTL

Kingston Wharves Limited (KWL) and Kingston Freeport Terminals Limited (KFTL), the port terminals operating at Port Bustamante, have so digitalised their operations that they were able to

act speedily in response to the coronavirus by implementing the following measures:

- An appointment system for all customers, including those citizens who rely on less-than-containerload incoming cargo, such as barrels. The appointment system avoids any congestion of customers, so that social distancing can be observed while citizens collect their valuable personal cargo;
- E-payment, where possible;
- Electronic submission of ship documents.

These and other measures that have been implemented by the port terminals are ensuring that the people of Jamaica can continue to receive and send cargo that are so vital for human needs.

ADVANTUM PROVIDING IT SOLUTIONS FOR SHIPPING

Members and associates of the SAJ are utilising the services of ADVANTUM to establish e-payment windows and other state-of-the-science applications that have been developed by ADVANTUM specifically for their partners in the shipping industry. For over a decade, ADVANTUM has been providing specialised information and communications technology (ICT) services for shipping interests in the Caribbean and is an active member of the steering committee on Jamaica's Port Community System project; they therefore have the advantage of current knowledge to ensure that their applications are compatible in generating files for integration.

At the Caribbean Shipping Association's 18th Caribbean Shipping Executives' Conference, staged last year in Jamaica, the company screened a video presentation on their new Motor Vehicle Management System that provides digital real-time tracking of vehicle movement and location for offloading and trans-shipment. It features the convenience of hand-held devices and smart cards for speedy and precise operations.

ADVANTUM's Port, Freight, eLabour, Equipment Management, GuardRoute Tracking, and Motor Vehicle Management Systems meet or exceed the highest industry standards worldwide. Also, clients have described ADVANTUM Financials as "a money-saving and moneymaking application that is easily adaptable".

"The ADVANTUM vision is futuristic and client-focused", says Kay Wilson-Kelly, the company's operations manager, who adds that these new business applications are supported by speedy responsiveness and unparalleled service delivery. She states: "ADVANTUM applications are custom-built to clients' specific requirements, while offering 24-hour on-call service and the most thorough on-site pretesting of business solutions that satisfy our customers' needs."

SHIPPING IS THE 'NEW NORMAL'

In a recent BBC report, Chloe Demrovsky, chief executive officer of the Disaster Recovery Institute International, stated that "when the economy reopens, it won't go back to how it was all at once; our habits may have changed, together with the width of our wallets". She said that during coronavirus lockdowns, activities such as grocery shopping movie watching, company meetings and e-learning, among others, have largely moved online. Noting that these may not be short-term trends, she added: "Businesses that aren't getting creative now about how they can be useful in a new post-COVID economy will struggle."

Jamaica's shipping industry is showing the way for meeting the challenges of the current crisis, as well as for the post-COVID era that's ahead; embracing change, promoting innovation, and moving

forward as a team through shared digital platforms.

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