# Time to see the light over CLOUD TECHNOLOGIES

**The steps being taken towards adopting new technologies are far too slow and are overlooking newer and far more functional developments, writes John DeBenedette**

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e-Airway Bill (e-AWB) adoption remains a hotly debated topic at major industry events and in the media. We have witnessed slow but steady progress, and the conversation is shifting from grasping for clarity, to discussing adoption hurdles, and celebrating meaningful successes. Despite the real progress that has been made, and the continued positive momentum, we still hear calls for "common e-platforms to facilitate data sharing" as well as the view that "technology is not the problem". In order to square these potentially opposing views, perhaps we need to drill a bit deeper into the future, moving beyond e-AWB to full e-freight.

Among the remaining obstacles to achieving 100% e-AWB adoption are regulators requiring paper documents and the slow pace of upgrades to legacy systems and message formats. In addition, we cannot leave out the high cost of messaging. This huge cost-burden undoubtedly drains resources that could otherwise be channelled into innovation.

## Obstacles

As we expand the goal to full e-freight (encompassing all the major trade documents in the air cargo chain), the set of obstacles is even larger. The number of stakeholders expands exponentially to include among others, shippers who ultimately provide the essential commercial invoice and packing list (and other pouch documents) to their forwarders and consignees. The current information-sharing approach of 'store and forward' messaging has high overheads with each entity validating, storing and relaying the same messages over and over, and these overheads multiply with each new e-document.

In contrast, today Google's business applications have millions of users securely sharing and collaborating on billions of documents in the 'cloud'. Google's decision not to operate in China notwithstanding, modern cloud architectures like Google and others are effectively infinitely scalable and could house every master and house waybill, and document pouch in the air cargo world without breaking a sweat.

There are initiatives under way to address some pieces of the puzzle. For example Cargo-XML to replace Cargo-IMP to remove limitations on what can be expressed in cargo documents, and recommendations like OASIS AS4 which is being considered to replace the 'per-character' costs of data communications on private aviation networks with secure, reliable, commoditized internet communications.

## Newer technologies

Unfortunately, it may be the case that these initiatives will only move us from the 1960s to the 1990s in terms of expressiveness, technology, functionality and cost. At the risk of losing non-technical readers, modern cloud-based technology is a whole generation newer, and in many senses better, than developments in the pipeline for air cargo. B2C e-commerce running on cloud based architectures handling billions of transactions, including financial settlements, have become pervasive on the web. This newer breed of secure business collaboration technologies use a new set of buzzwords like JSON/REST over HTTP, instead of XML over SOAP that we in air cargo are slowly adopting.

As we consider our approaches and make investments to move our industry into the future, collectively hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars are at stake just to shed our 1960s' legacy. It is never too late to inject some new thinking into the mix and it would be beneficial to see the many technology providers and beneficial stakeholders (including airlines, handlers, and regulators) come together to explore these newest technologies, and perhaps even new business models for inter-operability and collaboration that could accelerate our leap into the cloud before it, too, becomes a legacy technology.

A start could be made at both the IATA and TIACA events in the near future. Perhaps in 2015 we can move this forward.

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