

Vizion-ary partnership

Gemini's joint venture with logistics partner built on long-time trust.

BY CHRIS DUPIN

Gemini Shippers Association has forged a joint venture with Vizion Logistics to provide transport for smaller shipments and other services for its members.

“Gemini is able to provide contracts for full container shipments for our members, but there are many other services that our members ask for that the association can’t directly provide,” said Sara Mayes, president of Gemini. These include services such as less-than-containerload (LCL), air freight, purchase order management, and warehousing.

“In the past we would give out names, including Vizion’s name, but we realized it would actually make more sense if we could actually do this and promote it as a joint venture,” she said. “This is a company that we are comfortable working with, that we have enough faith in that we can share confidential information.”

Likewise, she said Vizion is comfortable enough with Gemini that its president, Albert Wei, “has talked to us about customers they have that need full container rates when we can provide more competitive rates. It benefits their customers, and it certainly benefits our members.”

Mayes said although only a few members have used the program so far, they have been “extremely pleased” with it. But she adds “Gemini is very conservative, we are not pushing it on anybody. If you have somebody you are working with now for your air freight, your LCL, that’s fine... When you come to us and say you would like some other options,” then Gemini will refer members to Vizion.

“We try to complement each other,” Wei said, speaking together with Mayes at Gemini’s office in Manhattan about the joint venture, now about two years old.

Mayes said Gemini seeks to provide competitive rates with no commitment by shippers, while Wei noted “we have a lot of value-added services that the association does not provide.”

Gemini has about 200 member companies and currently has 15 ocean carrier contracts. The association arranges between 50,000-

100,000 forty-foot equivalent units (FEUs) annually, but that individual members move widely varying amounts of cargo—some as few as 200 FEUs and others in the 10,000-FEU range.

The association does not ask members for cargo commitments, and while members pay a per-container fee there’s no membership dues.

Vizion was founded in 2003 by Wei and his brother Benjamin, who lives in Los Angeles.

They formed the company after working for several years at other firms. The brothers began their careers in finance, but got into logistics within several years. Both worked for Rical Express, as did their stepfather Gabriel Lee. Albert Wei also spent several years working for Expeditors.

They met Mayes, who was import manager at a succession of companies that were all Rical customers – Holiday Fair, Bag Bazaar, and Accessory Network.

Mayes eventually joined the Fashion Accessories Shippers Association, an affiliate of Gemini, and became the protégé of its late president Harold Saks.

Wei said his company arranges from 4,000 to 6,000 TEUs of LCL shipments annually, and Gemini’s business accounts for about 10-15 percent of that volume.

Even big shippers have a need for LCL shipments, Mayes said.

For example, Gemini had a customer that one year shipped about 7,000 high cube 40-foot containers of product, and in a normal year has about half that demand. “But they’ll use Vizion for the LCL, for air freight and they are very happy,” Mayes said.

“Everybody always wants to fill a perfect container, but there’s sometimes cargo left-over and those leftovers cannot be moved with the next container, so instead they want to move it as an LCL and then we will handle that,” Wei explained.

Vizion offers warehousing and consolidation services throughout China. For example, Wei said there’s a Gemini member that has a lot of samples and needs them brought to a central site where a decision must be made about whether to move the

shipments as a full container. “If so, then it moves on a Gemini full container contract or they say okay, we need it urgently, let’s move it LCL,” he said.

Mayes said the arrangement is good for new customers. “A prospective member came in a couple of months ago and said they haven’t really gotten their business started yet, but they’re planning to import more and once it gets up and running they expect to be doing a couple of hundred containers a year. But right now they’re small, they’re bringing in samples that may bring in a container or two. They don’t know where to warehouse the goods, they don’t know how to clear customs, they don’t know how to distribute the goods once they come in, they don’t know how to get the goods from the factories to the pier overseas. So every single aspect, if they didn’t have somebody they were comfortable with, they’d end up going to 20 different companies, and now you’re getting all these charges from different people with all sort of costs you never anticipated,” she said.

Wei said his company can act as a business’s “international department, helping them manage the flow of their cargo. We become their eyes and ears.”

“There are large companies—Expeditors, DHL, CEVA, Kuehne + Nagel—that provide these end-to-end services, but what they don’t have is they are not booking freight under the Gemini contract. The advantage that Vizion has is that they are saving you the money on the ocean freight,” Mayes said.

“We pride ourselves in the actual personalized handling of customers,” Wei said. “We write an SOP (standard operating procedure) for every client. We make sure we understand what they are doing.”

In addition to the Gemini business, Vizion develops services for U.S. exporters trying to piggyback on President Obama’s export initiative.

Unusual niches the company is seeking to grow are executive relocation and logistics for the hotel industry.

The company recently opened an office in Macau and is partnering with a company that does hotel installation. Macau, Wei said, has become the Las Vegas of Asia and more U.S. hotels are now moving onto the island. As hotels are built, each room must be furnished with beds, desks, pictures, photographs, all installed a certain way. Both the installation and shipping of those furnishings are a tremendous logistical challenge.

“They are building some pretty big hotels there — 2,000-3,000 room hotels,” he said. At many hotels, rooms are renovated every five years, creating new opportunities for business. ■