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Issue 073 April 2017 [www.themover.co.uk](http://www.themover.co.uk)

# TheMover

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## HONG KONG GROUPAGE

An interview with the man who started it all. Page 28

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## LEADER

## Working on the business

Steve Jordan, Editor



I had some contact with an organisation some years ago called Action Coach. No, it's not the local bus service, it's a business coaching franchise, international I think. To my mind it was all an exercise in the blindingly obvious and I could never understand why, if the coaches knew all the answers, they were not all filthy rich and living in Barbados. Maybe I misunderstood something. But I did learn one thing. We all need to allow some time to work on our businesses, not in them.

The problem for most of us, me certainly, is that we spend so much time trying to get the job done that we never have time to stand back and look at the big picture. The helicopter view is just not one most of us see very often.

I had a very good example last month. I had the privilege of attending both the FIDI conference in Dubai and the OMNI conference in The Seychelles. Both excellent events in their own way, but very different. FIDI attracts 600+ people. It's about work. People going into huddles discussing, well I don't know what they are discussing but I suspect it's operational not strategic. The business sessions are educational and interesting but, again, they tend to tackle day-to-day issues such as how to comply with FAIM requirements and the consequences of SOLAS. I think this is an excellent thing to do and I congratulate FIDI for doing a first-class job – but there needs to be more. Sometimes it's necessary to take a step back.

The OMNI conference is, for those entitled to attend, that step. It's smaller, usually 100-150 people, and only the business owners and senior managers attend. It's usually held somewhere relaxing and beautiful. The pace is slower. Dress codes are casual. The business meetings, unlike most others in the moving calendar, are fully attended. Mobile phones are turned off. Business cards are unnecessary. People join in, listen, learn and contribute their wisdom for the good of the membership, the organisation and the industry as a whole. It's a strategic forum that involves some of the industry's leading players. There is nothing else like it.

So, as you go about your daily tasks, and you struggle to achieve your 'to do' list, consider taking a break. Call it an OMNI moment if you like. Let your mind relax and the inspiration flow. Work on your business for once, not in it.

Steve Jordan



Some of Clark's 18-strong FORS accredited fleet.

## Clark's of Amersham achieves FORS accreditation

Clark's of Amersham has announced that it has attained, at the first time of trying, Bronze Fleet Operators Recognition Scheme accreditation (FORS).

**F**ORS is a voluntary accreditation scheme that promotes best practice for commercial operators across the UK. This includes safe working, driver awareness, and proof of continual improvement. FORS has 4,250 accredited members operating over 140,000 vehicles.

**"This award gives positive proof of best practice and that our systems are up to scratch."**

Michael Clark

The FORS Standard represents a quality and performance benchmark and recognises fleet operations that comply with the requirements of Transport for London's operating standard.

Clark's of Amersham is a family

run business that has supplied removals and storage services for nearly 25 years to the domestic and commercial markets. Its growth has been impressive, starting as a husband and wife team with only one van, it now has 18 vehicles, 50 staff and four warehouses.

The company recently successfully pitched for a new piece of business which included transportation in and around London and having the FORS accreditation became a part of that contractual agreement.

Michael Clark, Managing Director said, "We know our customers want their service provider to be safer and greener. This award gives positive proof of best practice and that our systems are up to scratch. To maintain it we will continue to be reviewed annually and plan to move up the accreditations with Silver firmly in our sights for next year. I am very proud of what we as a team have achieved, including improving our driver training and vehicle safety."



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## NEWS: UK

## Look after last-time buyers

Research from the International Longevity Centre – UK (ILC-UK), a leading think tank, has found that most 65-79-year-old people live in under occupied houses.

**B**y providing more appropriate housing for the last-time buyers, it might be possible to free up larger homes for families thereby helping to alleviate the housing crisis in the UK.

Responding to Housing Minister Gavin Barwell's suggestion that making it easier for older people to downsize could help solve the housing crisis (and create more business for moving companies), the ILC-UK has urged the UK government to ensure thousands of new retirement properties are built as a matter of urgency. Surveys conducted by the ILC-UK have also found that lack of supply is a key reason why older people do not downsize.

"The Housing Minister is right to recognise that meeting the needs of last time buyers and encouraging downsizing is crucial to addressing the housing crisis," said ILC-UK Chief Executive Baroness Sally Greengross. "Downsizing can also ensure that older people live in properties that allow them to stay in their own homes for longer, and can release equity that can be used to fund social care in later life."



● Older people downsizing could release larger properties onto the housing market.



● Emigration from the UK to the US is up around 20% on last year.

## Brits still moving to USA despite Trump

New research from UK-based 1st Move International shows that although distressed Americans looking to flee Donald Trump's presidency have swamped Google as they searched for the nearest exit to Canada, a steady stream of UK nationals are just as eager to move to the US to make up the numbers.

**T**he company says that emigration to the States is up around 20% on last year – notwithstanding last year's election. Managing Director Jim Limerick said: "More people googled 'move to Canada' following Donald Trump's victory than ever before. But it's not - and never has been - one way traffic. We haven't seen any equivalent drop off in people looking to move there – in fact numbers are growing."

Based in Avonmouth near Bristol, 1st Move International employs 30 people packing personal effects and household goods for people moving abroad, with American-bound clients making up a hefty 40% of the firm's business. "There are still compelling reasons why people

**"More people googled 'move to Canada' following Donald Trump's victory than ever before."**

Jim Limerick

will continue moving to the United States no matter who has moved in to the White House," said Jim. "Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is third highest in the world behind Norway and Ireland but most of our clients are looking for the simple things - better weather,

a better job and a fresh start." Jim also said that the USA has the lowest property price to income ratio, making US real estate much more affordable than that of the UK, which has one of the highest ratios.

1st Move International's figures were based on 11 separate sets of data including GDP per capita, income tax levels, average net incomes, real wages, education ranking, property price to income ratio, crime and unemployment levels, healthcare efficiency, food costs and familiarity with English. Jim concluded: "While most Americans ended up staying put despite their reservations over Donald Trump's approach, UK families don't seem to have changed their minds about heading west."

## Coppards celebrates first year as a Bishop's Move franchise

**B**romley-based Coppards Removals & Storage Ltd is celebrating its first year as a Bishop's Move franchise by adding a refurbished five-container Mercedes in Bishop's livery to the fleet.

Coppards' Managing Director Richard Russ is very pleased with the Bishop's franchise and is

looking forward to working with the company for the foreseeable future. The franchise allows a larger area than previously covered, from south east London to the Kent Coast. The new addition to the fleet takes the total number of vehicles to 20, keeping the Coppards expansion plan on track for 2017.

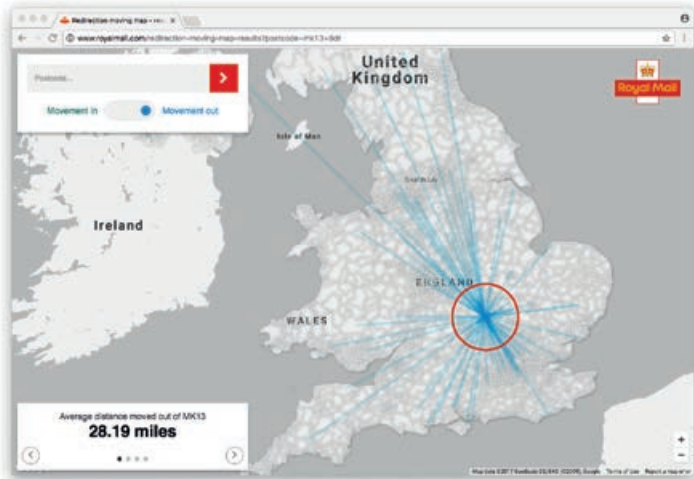


● Coppards truck in Bishop's livery.



## Where do your customers go?

The Royal Mail has analysed over a million redirections between September 2015 and September 2016 to understand the nation's home moving habits and establish where people move to from any location in the UK.



www.royalmail.com/redirection-moving-map.

The information can be used by moving companies to establish the most potentially productive areas of the country and their local market share.

Maybe it will come as no great surprise, but the research claims the average distance moved is just 25.83 miles. The longest move recorded was to London from the Shetland Isles, 728 miles. People in the north-west of England prefer to stay close to home, moving an average of just 19.17 miles.

**“This map paints a picture of where people are moving to and from providing a unique insight into the distances people travel to find the perfect home.”**

Jim Conning

Using the data, the company has built an interactive map that can be searched by postcode to reveal the

number of moves in and out of an area and the shortest and longest moves. It can be found at [www.royalmail.com/redirection-moving-map](http://www.royalmail.com/redirection-moving-map). The map provides details of the longest move from a postcode area, the shortest, the average distance moved and, most importantly, the number of moves both to and from an area. By cross checking this with their own customer data it's easy for a moving company to establish its statistical market share and work out whether this is getting better or worse, year on year.

The information can also be used to establish which areas of the country are potentially most productive and direct marketing effort accordingly.

Jim Conning, Managing Director of Data Services at Royal Mail, said: “Royal Mail redirects millions of letters and parcels every day, making sure that important documents and personal information follow home movers wherever they move to. This map paints a picture of where people are moving to and from providing a unique insight into the distances people travel to find the perfect home.”

Instructions on how to add this interactive map to your website can be obtained from [rebecca.maund@royalmail.com](mailto:rebecca.maund@royalmail.com).

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● Removals superheroes: companies that go above and beyond the call of duty when following up leads are more likely to get the business.

## How to convert more removal leads

Damien Seaman from [buzzmove.com](http://buzzmove.com) offers advice and some tips from other moving companies on converting more of your online leads into hard business.

**L**ead generation is now a common source of new business for removal companies in the UK. Even the big removal brands use them. But the value of lead generation is based largely on how well those leads convert. Some removal companies convert at 40% or even more, while others continue to struggle. What makes the difference?

### Call as soon as you can

The best time to call a lead is as soon as it comes through. This is when your prospect is most interested in moving and most likely to respond to your call. According to Paul Fajemisin, Service Coordinator at FA Removals: "It just gives the right impression. You call straight away and people seem to think, 'They know what they're doing,' and that we're keen for the business."

It's a point supported by Steve Thomas of Four Square Removals: "It's just basic marketing, calling the leads quickly. You've got to do it because there are loads of removal companies out there and if you're not quick enough the customer will go with someone else."

Now, this advice is fine as far as it goes. But what if a lead doesn't answer the phone right away? What should you do then?

Buzzmove research over the last six months shows a clear trend. The best

**"It just gives the right impression. You call straight away and people seem to think, 'They know what they're doing,' and that we're keen for the business."**

Paul Fajemisin

window to call a lead is between 11am and 3pm on the day the lead comes through. If they don't pick up, response remains high on the following day during the same window. After that, it's best to continue following up via e-mail.

### Show that you care about your customers early on

A good removal company puts its customers first and does whatever it can to deliver a good service. But to convert a lead, you need to show this early on in your communication. So when sending a follow up e-mail after a call, mention your great reviews. Maybe add in a couple of glowing testimonials from other customers saying what a good job you did for them.

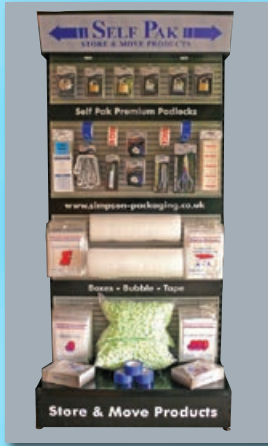
Tell your leads about the things you do that go above and beyond.

For example, at Cottam Light Haulage, staff make a point of showing up to a job in clean and pressed uniforms and polished boots. And they never smoke on the job. As one of the partners, Gareth Cottam, said: "What we like to think is: 'If they were coming to my house, would I be happy with the service?' And that's how we carry out the jobs." You probably have a similar policy in your company. But if you do, then mention it early. It could set you apart from the competitors.

### Go above and beyond when you do a home survey

We all know that surveying a customer's property prior to giving a quote is probably the best way to push conversions higher – up to 80% higher, according to some removal companies I've talked to. But can you do more during a survey to convert that lead into a paying job? One removal company leaves behind a printed flyer after a survey. On the back of the flyer are spaces for customers to write in their gas and electricity meter readings on move day. It's a clever touch that shows attention to detail and care for customers' needs. If you can do the same at every step of your contact with customers, you're much more likely to convert them. Good luck!





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## NEWS: UK

## Statutory rate changes effective April 2017

In the UK, the statutory payments for employers have increased.

On 2 April, 2017, Statutory Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Shared Parental Leave rates all increased from £139.58 to £140.98.

On 6 April, 2017, Statutory Sick Pay increased from £88.45 to £89.35. The Apprentice Levy also came into force. Employers with an annual payroll of more than £3 million will be required to pay a 0.5% levy on their total pay bill.

Employers that dismiss employees for redundancy must pay those with two years' service an amount based on the employee's weekly pay, length of service and age. The weekly pay is subject to a maximum amount which, from 6 April, 2017 becomes £489, increasing from £479. This means that the top award of statutory redundancy pay also increases to £14,670 from £14,370.

The Unfair Dismissal award will be capped at £80,541 (previously £78,962).

The guarantee payment for lay off periods will now be £27 per day (previously £26).

The new rates are set out in the Employment Rights (Increase of Limits) Order 2017, which came into force on 6 April, 2017.



● Smart Storage's Altrincham facility.

## Self storage industry continues to grow

90% of people have now heard of self storage, but only 30% understand it according to Mike Wilson of Smart Storage.

According to Mike Wilson, a member of the Self Storage Association Board (SSA) and CEO of Smart Storage, more people than ever are putting their possessions in self storage, 90% of the population knows about it but 70% of the population still do not know how the units operate.

The figures are from the 2016 annual survey conducted by the SSA. It claims that 30% of people surveyed understand that only they have access to their units. This

includes the fact that self storage providers cannot enter the unit once they have handed over the keys.

Mike Wilson is keen to educate the population on what it means to rent a unit within a large facility. He said: "Even prior to this report being published, we saw a drastic increase in relation to reservations of our units over the past 12 months. This is down to people gaining a better understanding of our services but there's always more we can do to promote the benefits of the industry as a whole."

The SSA's annual report shows that throughout 2015 and 2016, the industry added another 1.9 million square feet of storage units through new business openings and significant expansion of existing spaces. Self storage units now cover around 37.6 million square feet of space in the UK.

**"The Internet really is a powerful tool and should be used alongside your bricks and mortar to attract even more clients to your business..."**

Mike Wilson

Mike Wilson also attributes this success to the Internet, with the number of leads coming through the web doubling in the space of a year. "The Internet really is a powerful tool and should be used alongside your bricks and mortar to attract even more clients to your business," he said.

The report says that the worldwide web has become the main driver of recognition in the self storage world this past year, with 11% of people attributing it as the reason they know about the service. It surpasses more traditional methods, such as outdoor advertising and word of mouth, which both are responsible for around 10% of people hearing about self storage.

## DFDS takes delivery of two new RoRo freight vessels

Ferry operator DFDS has taken delivery of the first of two new RoRo ships due to come into service on the Rotterdam-Immingham freight route later this year. The *Gardenia Seaways* and the second new ship, to be handed over in Flensburg in September, are 210 metres long and offer capacity for 262 trailers with a load space of 4,076 metres.

The DFDS fleet currently comprises six vessels, all named after flowers and supplied by German ship builder Flensburger Schiffbau-Gesellschaft between 2004 and 2007. The two new ships

will increase DFDS's capacity in the North Sea by 20%.

Peder Gellert, Executive Vice President of the Shipping Division at DFDS said, "The volume on all routes within the DFDS network has grown noticeably, we are already using almost all the capacity available in our existing fleet. *Gardenia Seaways* and the next new ship will enable us to offer our customers the capacity they want, together with a significantly improved service. The design of the ship, developed in Flensburg, meets current environmental requirements, reducing fuel



● DFDS *Gardenia Seaways*.

consumption and providing much better handling when loading and unloading in port."

The two ships will be joined in 2019 by another two RoRo freight vessels. These will be the largest

in the DFDS fleet so far. The company is also considering the construction of new combined freight and passenger ships, and the replacement of vessels in its existing passenger fleet.





• Ex-servicemen Shaun Theobald, Kim Jackson and Carl Kneller with Harrow Green's MD Nigel Dews.

## Harrow Green signs up to the Armed Forces Covenant

Harrow Green has announced that it has signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant to demonstrate its support for the armed forces community.

**T**he Armed Forces Covenant is a pledge between the government and people of the UK and all those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces and their families. It supports current and ex-service personnel and their families through policy, projects and services.

The intention is to ensure their sacrifices and duty are respected and that they face no disadvantage compared to other citizens. The government is encouraging businesses, local authorities, charities and the public to sign up to the Covenant to show their support for all ex-service personnel.

Nigel Dews, Managing Director of Harrow Green said, "We are very pleased to have joined over 1,000 other businesses and organisations who have signed the pledge. In signing the Armed Forces Covenant we have stated that we are an armed forces-friendly organisation. In 2015 we were awarded a three-year contract to provide relocation and storage services for Service Family Accommodation for the MOD. It was a natural next step to sign the

Covenant to further cement our commitment to supporting the armed forces and their families."

**"We are very pleased to have joined over 1,000 other businesses and organisations who have signed the pledge."**

Nigel Dews

Several Harrow Green employees are ex-service personnel and they bring extremely useful and relevant skills to the removals industry. Many of them are already experienced in HGV driving and have excellent abilities such as leadership, planning, team working and communication skills. They are a natural fit for the removals industry, which requires military precision timings and planning.

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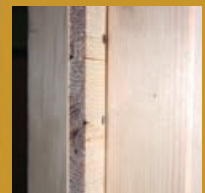
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## PROFILE: SIMPSON PACKAGING



● Andrew Simpson (left) and John Simpson.

# A BUSINESS TRANSFORMED

Editor Steve Jordan took a trip to Yorkshire to visit Simpson Packaging's new purpose-built HQ.

It was more than five years since I had visited Simpson Packaging in Dewsbury. I knew the company had moved premises, that was why I had braved the M1 amid the full fury of storm Doris, but I was still surprised at what I saw as the Satnav said 'You have reached your destination'.

The old place, around a mile away from the new premises, had been a perfectly serviceable, if modest, rented warehouse and office that had been the company's home for 19 years. I had expected an expansion of the facility ... but not this!

Simpson's new place is a purpose-built warehouse that is more than four times

the floor area, twice the height and with three times the office accommodation. It's of a completely different order.

Now I could ramble on about the size of the warehouse for as long as you like but, from a customer's point of view, it doesn't matter much. What does matter is what the company can now do that



## PROFILE: SIMPSON PACKAGING



**"Stock was often committed before it even arrived ... We couldn't take in enough at a time so we had a lot of split deliveries which wasn't good for customer service..."**

Andrew Simpson



● Top left: Simpson's new, purpose-built warehouse; far left: materials can be shrink wrapped for direct delivery to customers; bottom left: vehicle loading now takes place under cover; left: the new facility allows far more stock to be stored than at the old premises.



was more difficult, or impossible, before.

Well, for a start it can now buy in enough stock to satisfy the orders; a fundamental requirement of a supply company you might think. But it wasn't always so. Andrew Simpson explained that at the old place life was much more complicated. "Stock was often committed before it

even arrived into the depot," he said. "We couldn't take in enough at a time so we had a lot of split deliveries which wasn't good for customer service and increased our transport costs."

Now Simpson's can order in much larger volumes, ensuring they have stock for delivery on one load, and allowing them

to buy more economically thereby keeping costs down for customers. "People are expecting prices to go up because of Brexit and the increasing cost of materials," said Andrew. "But by buying more at a time we can help mitigate any price rises. We might not be able to hold them off  
*continues over*

## PROFILE: SIMPSON PACKAGING



● Left: Simpson carries around 3,000 product lines for delivery; centre and bottom: lightweight but bulky bubble wrap is stored on two mezzanine levels which are connected by a conveyor belt.



**“... by buying more at a time we can help mitigate any price rises. We might not be able to hold them off forever, but it does help.”**

Andrew Simpson



“We supply product images to customers that want their own box shop on their websites,” said Andrew. “Their customers just click on the items they want and we pack it up and deliver it directly to them. The moving company makes a mark-up on sales but never needs to even touch the product.”

Simpson’s also now has the facilities to provide shrink-wrapped products for retail stands in moving or self storage company receptions. In all it carries around 3,000 product lines all for delivery, nationwide, on its own vehicles and through its carrier network. There’s even a new trade counter so companies can collect their own materials if they are passing on the M1. Private customers can buy materials there too.

So Simpson’s new place is much more than a warehouse. It’s a new business. It is more efficient, has more lines, a new super-efficient IT system, £1,000,000 worth of stock, more staff, more vehicles and under-cover loading to keep everything dry in the Yorkshire rain (I thought it never rains in Yorkshire!). It’s virtually unrecognisable from the old days.

I left, quite stunned, partially by Doris I admit, but mostly by the total transformation of what was already a successful business. Well done chaps!

*continued from previous page*  
forever, but it does help.”

Bubble wrap is a good example. It’s lightweight, but bulky. The new place has two mezzanine floors, each of 4,000ft<sup>2</sup>, just for bubble (all types including: anti-static, self adhesive and the ordinary one movers use). The levels are connected by

a conveyor system allowing a full load of product to be received and stacked in minutes. Even so, Andrew said that they will turn the stock over every few days.

Then there are the additional services that were impossible in the old warehouse. These include the shrink wrapping of materials for direct delivery to customers.



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## NEWS: UK

## John Mason celebrates Australia Day 2017

John Mason International Movers has followed up on last year's 'Removals Men' video, with an even more ambitious and successful 'Crocodile Dundee' inspired video and social media campaign to celebrate Australia Day 2017 on 26 January.

Having helped over 50,000 people take the plunge Down Under during its 130-year history, the Aussie national holiday, marking the anniversary of the arrival of the first fleet of convict ships in Sydney Cove in 1788, is a big deal for John Mason.

The international movers marked the occasion by coming up with an innovative digital campaign, which offered two people the chance to win a trip to Australia after watching a clip of 'Mick Dundee' wreaking havoc in London. Onlookers in the clip are left stunned by the bizarre antics of a man going walkabout in full Crocodile Dundee outfit.

Of course, people watching the video quickly realise it is not Mick Dundee, of iconic 80s film *Crocodile Dundee*. Instead it is a character called Terry Chadwick, Customer Removals Operation Coordinator (CROC) of John Mason - described as a 'Pommie who loves Australia even though he has never been there!'

Simon Hood, Sales and Marketing Director, John Mason said, "We have been delighted with the response to the video across our social media platforms, from customers and colleagues alike. We wanted to produce a humorous and engaging series of films, with the aim of ensuring the maximum number of people were exposed to the John Mason brand and excited about Australia Day.



● 'Crocodile Dundee' in London.



● U-Move members receive their membership certificates.

## U-Move Group Ltd holds its first conference

Members of van & driver rental company U-Move Group gathered at Northamptonshire's prestigious Whittlebury Hall on 11 February for the Group's first national conference.

U-Move, which was formed last year by Andy Pearson and Mark Ratcliffe, offers people moving on a tight budget or without a driving licence the option of renting a van with a professional driver to transport their belongings.

After a welcoming address from co-founder Mark Ratcliffe, Andy Pearson introduced a number of guest speakers including Greg Wildman from insurance broker Basil Fry & Company; Danny Hazelgrove, whose company Fountain Digital is

responsible for the U-Move website, and Matt Ballard who gave a talk on the options available when acquiring new vehicles: leasing, buying or renting. Earlier, David Jordan from *The Mover* had explained some of the mysteries of getting stories in the press and how to catch the eye of the editor.

Following an excellent buffet lunch, Andy Pearson introduced a new arm to the U-Move Group: U-Move eUropean. This new service will provide movers with a regular delivery service from the UK to

Western Europe from receiving depots located in Markham Moor, Dereham and Eastbourne.

In closing, Andy thanked the members and guest speakers for attending the conference and hoped that everyone had taken something away from the day.

U-Move will have a trade stand at The Movers & Storers Show in November and at the Self Storage event in Berlin in October.

Next year's conference will be held at Whittlebury Hall in February.

● [www.u-movegroup.co.uk](http://www.u-movegroup.co.uk)

## Crown Records Management partners with Preservica to help preserve digital records

Crown Records Management has partnered with Preservica to help organisations ensure vital long-term digital records remain accessible into the future

As technology moves forwards at a faster and faster pace, businesses are being warned there is a serious risk of stored digital data becoming unreadable in the next decade. That's why Crown Records Management has selected digital preservation specialist, Preservica, as its partner to help businesses safeguard their digital records and ensure they are accessible over the long term.

"There is a vast and growing amount of digital information that organisations across all sectors need to keep long-term for compliance, regulatory, legal

and business value reasons," said Dominic Johnstone, Head of Information Management Services at Crown Records Management. In his opinion businesses are beginning to wake up to the reality that much of this information is at risk of becoming unusable over time due to technology and software obsolescence.

"Formats such as Lotus 1-2-3 and Wordstar are already obsolete, and Word Perfect and .MOV are in real danger of being unreadable in the near future, even though these formats were incredibly widespread just a few years ago."

Crown Records Management and Preservica are running a series of educational webinars on digital archiving and preservation over the coming months.





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## BUSINESS: WHAT'S IN A NAME?



● Gabby Gomes.

## What's in a name?

David Jordan went to see a moving company in Buckinghamshire that, through no fault of its own, has been landed with an unfortunate name and is battling to maintain business despite prejudice against it.

**W**hen Gabriel 'Gabby' Gomes founded his removals and storage business in Milton Keynes back in 2009 he wanted to give the fledgling company a name that would reassure customers they were dealing with a professional, caring mover. One of Gabby's children was studying Egyptology at the time and suggested he named the company after an Egyptian Goddess known for her caring and understanding nature – her name was Isis.

As we all know, the name Isis now has very different connotations and in recent years Gabby's caring understanding company has become a target for online abuse and threatening phone calls from people who have never used the company or met anyone who works there.

"It all started about two years ago when people started posting pictures of our trucks on Facebook and making silly comments," said Gabby. "We also have to put up with lots of nasty phone calls. It's

**"It's had a devastating effect on our business and despite having excellent reviews from our customers, our enquiries are down by about 40%."**

Gabriel Gomes

had a devastating effect on our business and despite having excellent reviews from our customers, our enquiries are down by about 40%. What makes things even worse is that I'm of Asian extraction, so when I turn up to do a survey in an Isis branded van I kind of fit the profile – it would be quite comical if it wasn't so serious."

Thankfully there is still enough business – especially at the upper end of the market – to keep things ticking over, and Gabby is hoping it will be a short-term problem. In the meantime, he is keen to do more subcontract work for other removal companies.

"When we started, almost all our work was for other removers, including some of the biggest companies in the industry, but as time went on we gradually found more work of our own and the trade work was put on the back-burner," said Gabby. "We currently do a lot of work for Pickfords but I would welcome enquiries from other moving companies as well. I've been in the removals industry for over thirty years and we have an excellent team of guys here in Milton Keynes that really know their business."

ISIS Relocation Ltd was voted Commercial Mover of the Year 2016 by the Alliance of Independent Movers.

● Contact Gabby on 01908 311001 or visit [www.isis-relocation.co.uk](http://www.isis-relocation.co.uk).





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## NEWS: INTERNATIONAL



● Experts calculate a rise from 90 million to 390 million customs declarations after Brexit. Photo courtesy of the Port of Felixstowe.

## UK customs IT system unable to cope with post-Brexit load

On 17 January, 2017 the UK Prime Minister Theresa May announced that Britain will leave the customs union. Therefore all goods arriving and leaving the UK will require customs declaration.

Experts calculated an increase from about 90 million to 390 million declarations per year by 2019 as EU goods movements will be classed in the same way as imports and exports from third countries.

The current computer system used by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) is 25 years old and was designed to handle 50 million filings a year. Its replacement, scheduled to be ready by 2019, was designed to cope with 100 million. The gap between the expected declarations per year and the efficiency of the new system awoken the fear that the new computer system designed to handle customs declarations in the UK may not be able to cope with the strain.

**“For a period of time, during the cutover and migration phase, HMRC is planning for the two systems (Chief and CDS) to operate in tandem at the border.”**

HMRC announced that they are “prioritising the delivery of Customs Declaration Service (CDS) to make it ready by January 2019. For a period of time, during the cutover

and migration phase, HMRC is planning for the two systems (Chief and CDS) to operate in tandem at the border. This would provide extra contingency should we need it, to ensure that the UK has a robust border declarations service.”

The government-industry body that oversees border issues, warned: “The possible reintroduction of customs declaration requirements and frontier controls could potentially cause major disruption at the border, particularly at the UK’s ferry/Ro-Ro ports and for trade using the Channel Tunnel.”

Article courtesy of Gabriela Dimitrova of FEDEMAC.

## UTS Germany to join the UniGroup Worldwide Moving Network

UniGroup Worldwide Moving has announced that UTS Germany will join its global moving network later this year. UTS Germany has 14 locations throughout Germany which offer a wide range of moving and logistics services.

“We are thrilled to welcome UTS Germany to our global network,” said UniGroup Worldwide Moving’s Chief Operating Officer Jim Petzel. “Our shared commitment to quality and compliance make this partnership a sound strategic decision.”

Axel Schurbaum, CEO of UTS Germany said, “We have known UniGroup and its shareholders for more than 15 years. After its accession to the UniGroup Worldwide Moving Global Network, UTS Germany will intensify this relationship, strengthen its market position in Germany and create value for our customers and shareholders. UTS Germany will be an innovative, reliable and focussed partner for the whole UniGroup Worldwide Global Network.”



● Jim Petzel.

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● Guernsey harbour. Photo: Jamie Le Tissier.



## The joys of moving people to Guernsey

Guernsey is a wonderful place to visit and to live. It's easy to see why anyone would want to move there. But for moving companies, a job to the Channel Islands might sound like a good idea, but it has its pitfalls. Ant Austen from Guernsey Relocation Services offers some sage advice.

**O**kay, you've secured a move from the UK to Guernsey and you're thinking, "Nice little job. A quick blip across the English Channel, and back again." Tread wisely! With duplicated road names, elusive maps and only the odd signpost, Guernsey's 25 square miles remains a winding maze for the visitor. Not to mention Google Maps and Satnav.

If you don't want to join the hire cars tangled up in the nature trails, seek some local advice on the road laws. It could be crucial to the rest of your schedule.

In Guernsey, for example, the speed limit for commercial vehicles is 25mph and there are strict vehicle restrictions: Maximum width - 2.31 metres (not 2.55 metres as on the mainland); Maximum length - 9.45 metres.

Along the eastern seafront, the 'Harbours Route' permits oversized vehicles to ferry freight and fresh produce to the many industrial sites. To avoid the head-on traffic of the inland roads, cars and light trade vehicles arch into driveways and surf the pavements. The country roads are single lanes

(two-way) just about wide enough for a Luton-sized van to slowly pass through.

During the week, Condor Ferries has two freight vessels sailing between Portsmouth, Guernsey and Jersey. The consignment must have a full inventory, shipping note and a Customs C15 Form (signed by the client). Shipped alcohol is remanded until customs calculate the duty owed and have received full payment.

**If you don't want to join the hire cars tangled up in the nature trails, seek some local advice on the road laws.**

So, if you're moving someone to Guernsey, you could try to do it yourself, but beware. You might need some help or, at least, a little guidance. Guernsey-based removal companies will happily provide transshipment services with local drivers and help to save you the hassle.

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## OPINION: DRIVER DISTRACTIONS



# Mobile phones are not the only distraction for drivers

Deputy Editor David Jordan comments on the new rules for drivers using mobile phones and looks at some other distractions that put us all at risk.

**A**s you probably know, the penalties for using a mobile phone while driving in the UK were doubled on 1 March, 2017 to a £200 fine and six penalty points. For those caught within two years of passing their test the penalty is even more severe and will require the offender to retake both the Theory and Practical test to regain their entitlement to drive. Professional drivers are also likely to suffer more penalties from their employer and may even lose their job.

**If there was a minimum fine of £1,000 for not looking where you're going I suspect there would be far fewer distracted drivers.**

Traffic Commissioners can also call professional drivers to conduct hearings for mobile phone offences. For the first mobile phone offence, the starting point is a four-week suspension of the driver's vocational licence.

Quite right too in my opinion; but why have mobile phones been singled out for special treatment?

During my travels, up and down the country, I've seen drivers reading maps

at the wheel; a lady driving towards me putting on mascara; a man reading a newspaper while driving on the motorway; and watched people driving off from our local Costa Coffee drive-through holding a cup full of scalding liquid in one hand and trying to steer with the other. How distracting would that be if you spilt it on your sensitive regions? Car manufacturers even seem to encourage drinking while driving – well, non-alcoholic drinks at least – otherwise why would they install cup holders in their cars?

Car accessory manufacturers are no better. Did you know there's a full range of clipboards designed to fit on a steering wheel to make it easier to write on? You can even get ones to hold your laptop at the perfect angle for typing and at least one that can accommodate a calculator as well. Google 'clipboards for steering wheels' if you don't believe me. Okay, they are supposed to be used when you're parked, but over the past few years I've seen people using them on the move on more than one occasion.

There is no doubt that society is obsessed with mobile media and there have been a number of high-profile cases recently in the UK involving drivers using mobile phones causing terrible accidents and deaths. While in no way condoning drivers

using mobiles, offenders are an easy target and evidence is readily available to gain a conviction, but as the examples above show, phones are far from the only distraction at the wheel.

Some motoring organisations are calling for better driver education to help solve the problem, and I agree. The best way of educating them is to hit them very hard in the wallet, not send them on training courses they don't want or need to attend. Everyone who drives knows what they should and should not be doing behind the wheel, it's just that some don't care. We all make mistakes out there on the road, however good we are at driving, but nobody accidentally uses a mobile phone, drinks coffee, or reads a newspaper when they're behind the wheel, they are all deliberate acts that put others in danger.

If there was a minimum fine of £1,000 for not looking where you're going I suspect there would be far fewer distracted drivers. And if you think that's a bit harsh, remember, that's what you get for not having a television licence.

**David Jordan is a former motorcycle riding instructor and a member of the Institute of Advanced Motorists.**



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## BUSINESS: INTERNET SUCCESS

# How to become more successful on the Internet

Using the Internet to its fullest advantage to generate enquiries is essential in modern marketing. Marco Maruccia, Sales Director of TriGlobal, discusses the top trends in Internet marketing and how moving companies should be making it work for them.

**I**n 2016, the role of the Internet as the most important market place for international removals was decisively strengthened, not only for the private market, but for business moving too. But the traditional moving industry is changing too slowly to take full advantage of the opportunities available. In my opinion, and of our experts at TriGlobal, here are the top five trends and developments in e-commerce for moving services.

**1** The Internet is, and will remain, the largest market place for international removals. Google is unbeatable with a growth of approximately 10% each year. Getting a good position in this search engine requires ever more knowledge, investment and continuous optimisation. Only the companies with adequate resources will be able to sustain prime Google positions in the short and long term.

### TriGlobal

TriGlobal started in 2004 as a market place for consumers who are looking to move and qualified movers, it has now changed itself to a strategic partner for professional international moving companies. The company works to help its customers get the most out of the Internet.

**2** The business market is showing more private searching and buying behaviour. This is reinforced by the trend towards smaller companies and generates more business-driven buyers outside of the contracts and preferred supplier channels.

**3** The patience and the decision time of the clients is becoming even shorter. The client reads less, looks at pictures more and prefers to watch videos. The desire for speed requires ease of use, service simplification, transparency and the ability to compare service providers easily. The role and market position of the comparison platforms is growing because of these client demands.

**4** Everything increasingly revolves around recommendations, both via independent review platforms and social media. Sustainable growth of an enterprise is only possible with a continuously high level of customer satisfaction, measured by independent organisations.

**The patience and the decision time of the clients is becoming even shorter. The client reads less, looks at pictures more and prefers to watch videos.**



● Left to right: Ralf Giesen, Laura van der List, Amin Belhaj and Marco Maruccia.



# SHOULD YOU HAVE TO FIT IN A BOX?



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5 Communication preferences are changing rapidly. Mobile is already bigger than PC and the original voice phone is changing to a type phone: the client doesn't want to be called but wants quick and easy communication through trusted apps such as WhatsApp and iMessage. The consumer requires access round the clock.

**What does this mean for the industry and to your company?**

The moving industry faces a new phase in its evolution. If the industry doesn't adapt itself to these changed client wishes, new entrants will take over the contact and negotiation with the client. They will put themselves between the client and the mover resulting in the evaporation of operating margin. The moving company will only be allowed to perform the move, at the lowest rates. Preventing this requires a strategic choice to invest in e-commerce now (not soon!) – independently if you can, or with strategic partners, to maintain or increase your independence and your market position.



● The original voice phone is changing to a type phone and clients don't want to be called but want quick and easy communication.



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## COVER STORY: ASIAN EXPRESS



# The father of Hong Kong groupage

Steve Jordan visited Andy Mak from Asian Express, during a passing visit to Hong Kong, to hear his story and more about his position as the father of Hong Kong groupage.

It had been over 30 years since I had last been in Hong Kong. As my wife and I were passing through, I thought it a good opportunity to catch up with my old friend Andy Mak from Asian Express who I hadn't seen, other than in conference bars, since I last visited in the 1980s. Then I was looking for shipments. Now I just wanted a story.

Much had changed since the old days. The last time I remember the landing at the old airport was interesting – in the same way that a roller coaster ride or a nightmare is interesting. This time it was a much more sedate affair as we touched down on Lantau Island and swept into Kowloon across futuristic bridges, past forests of stickle-brick tower blocks

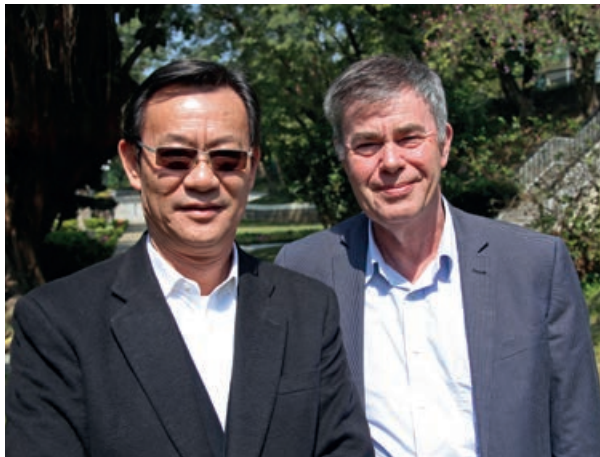
reflecting the flickering neon of Hong Kong island. Hong Kong was even bigger and brighter than before, but what else had changed?

Well Andy hadn't. When we met the following day he didn't even look any older than in 1986. I sent out a search party to locate the painting in the attic but without success. He'd probably shipped





● Above: Steve and Sheila Jordan were greeted enthusiastically by the staff at Asian Express in Hong Kong; left: Andy with Warwick Woodley.



**"I was competing against the biggest companies in the world; people with deep pockets, so the key had to be service."**

Andy Mak

that to Canada along with everything else years earlier.

Warwick Woodley joined us as Andy drove us out of the city toward the Chinese border and his beloved Hong Kong Jockey Club for lunch. Andy has been passionate about riding since the 1970s, part owns a race horse and has his own steed, a retired racer called *Win a Dozen* that occupies his leisure hours. Warwick has recently joined the company from New Zealand to manage the Hong Kong office.

The Asian Express office is in central Kowloon. As with everywhere in Hong Kong, it's part of a high-rise block. The office comes with access to its own pub, coffee bar, shops and fabulous views over the staggering skyline. I have been to many

moving company offices over the last 40 years, and I knew Andy to be welcoming to visitors but, even so, I was shocked by the reception. As we walked into the central office, we were greeted by a 10-metre long sign welcoming us, and a staff that had been perfectly briefed, with military precision, to gather for a ceremonial photograph. I thought, if this is the way Andy runs his moving company, no wonder he's done OK.

Andy Mak is one of the first generation of movers in Hong Kong. In fact he claims to be the father of Hong Kong household goods groupage. I suspect few would challenge him.

He was born in 1950 in Hong Kong to parents who had fled China when the

communists took over. He took a summer job in 1968 with Crown and, after completing his education, joined the company full time in 1971. After he'd been there a year, the company's owner, Jim Kreigsmann, asked him to start a new company providing household goods groupage services. That's how it all started.

Still in his 20s, Andy had to learn how to start and run a business. He'd be the salesman during the morning, knocking on shop doorways looking for furniture to ship for wealthy expatriates; a packer and supervisor in the afternoon; and would drive the trucks to the port in the evening. "I really enjoyed the challenge," said Andy. "I appreciated Jim trusting me, having confidence in me and giving me the opportunity."

The company went from zero to around 70 packers in a few short years with Andy as Crown's first non-American general manager. But in 1978 came a change. A new company ownership will always be positive for some and not for others. It left Andy feeling upset and disappointed. Now that we all live in a much more culturally aware society, most business people know not to cross the Chinese. It's never going to end well.

Andy left Crown that same year. He had no money and for three months he did nothing. "Then I thought, if I can start one company, I can start another." With the aid of significant financial support from his parents, and the help of people who trusted him, Asian Express was born.

Andy had chosen a good time. There were very few groupage companies, if

*continues over*

## COVER STORY: ASIAN EXPRESS

*continued from previous page*

any, in Hong Kong at the time. Andy knew how to do it and already had the contacts. What's more, the British lease on Hong Kong was about to expire in 1997 and many Hong Kong Chinese were getting very twitchy about what the future had in store, especially those old enough to remember the stories of what had happened in China only a few decades earlier.

Throughout the 1980s and 90s the business flooded in from private individuals, keen to flee Chinese rule and anxious to join relatives in Australia, the USA, Europe and, most especially, Canada. "Even my parents encouraged me to leave Hong Kong," said Andy, "but I had a business to run." His brothers, however, did leave and now live in New Zealand.

When dealing with local people, the Hong Kong Chinese, Andy had a big advantage over his competition: he understood the culture and what Chinese people wanted. Most of the competition were foreign investors which gave Andy an edge. "I was competing against the biggest companies in the world; people with deep pockets," he said. "So the key

**"You have to earn their trust just as I have to earn theirs. Maybe they can get better money somewhere else but it's not just money; it's how we work together as a team."**

Andy Mak



had to be service. I have been a packer, I have been a supervisor, I know what people can and cannot do and when they are going to pull a fast one. We always made sure that we delivered on our promises."

Andy's Chinese heritage was an advantage for private moves but was a disadvantage when it came to corporate work. "We all know that a Brit talks best to a Brit, an Aussie to and Aussie, an Italian to an Italian and German to a German," he said, breaking into very passable national accents as he worked his way through the list. "So I employed foreigners to open the doors for me." Warwick Woodley is his most recent recruit but Corin Packwood is a Brit who has been with Andy for many years; Chad Forrest, an American, runs the Beijing office; and Frenchman Benoit Morel runs Shanghai. Many other well-known names in the industry have also worked with Andy.

Inevitably, perhaps, Asian Express came under some pressure to join international

trading groups. Andy always knew that he had to be part of a network if his business was to continue its success. Then, around 15 years ago, he met Ed Voerman who was involved with UTS. "They invited me to a UTS meeting on the Dutch colonial island of Aruba and I was immediately made to feel welcome," said Andy. "I joined UTS and quickly had support from many companies, especially in Europe. It really made a difference." Asian Express is still an enthusiastic member of Harmony.

Andy's tales of how he started his offices in China – Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou – are probably best left for a late night in the bar, but let's just say, they are colourful. He started them all, from scratch, around 1994. "I figured, if it works in one place, it will work in another," he said. He didn't speak Mandarin, had no staff and no business. Then he picked up the Beijing American Embassy contract and set about putting an organisation together to handle it. When you next see Andy, ask him about it. He will tell you.

But for now, let's just say, it pays to be bold in business.

Asian Express now employs over 100 people, many of whom have very long service with the company. "We have one goal and we all pull in the same direction," said Andy. "That's what makes it work. I treat people fairly and understand that everyone is important. Even the tea lady [I got the impression he meant 'especially' the tea lady]. You have to earn their trust just as I have to earn theirs. Maybe they can get better money somewhere else but it's not just money; it's how we work together as a team."

As with most Chinese people, Andy believes in fate. It was all meant to be. His business has been successful for 38 years - and he has even been able to pay back his parents! What comes next, he doesn't know. He has no children to inherit the business but, at the tender age of 66, he has no real interest in retiring yet either. "They will have to carry me out of here in a box," he jokes. At least I think he was joking.





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# **TheMover**

## NEWS: ON THE ROAD



● Bespoke's swap body trailer (above) and six-man cab (right).



## Bespoke Bodies launches new vehicles for removals industry

Warrington-based vehicle body builder Bespoke Bodies Ltd has announced that it is now designing and building its own waggon & drag trailers.

**T**he company has also introduced a rigid 18 tonne vehicle with a modified aerodynamic sleeper pod and six-crew cab, which is ideal for the moving industry.

"Building our own trailers rather than buying them in from a third party means that we have full control of the production process," said Bespoke's Technical Director, John Sturt. "We are unusual in that we

are engineers as well as body builders and have all the skills to design and build trailers in-house from the ground up, without having to rely on others. That's particularly important for a low-volume niche market like the removals industry where you're often dealing with an order for a single unit."

Bespoke's engineers have taken great care to build all the latest technology into their new trailers

including electronic braking, anti-roll systems and the option of a de-mountable body. "Our trailers are built to the highest technical specifications and we have a policy of continual improvement to make sure we keep ahead of the game and competitive," said John.

The company's new 18 tonne rigid body can accommodate six people, including the driver, avoiding the need for a second vehicle to carry the removal crew to a job, while the aerodynamic sleeper pod reduces drag and therefore saves fuel. "It really is a win-win for the removals business," said John. "Being able to carry a crew of six in the cab is a major advantage, it not only saves fuel, it also means the second vehicle can be used productively elsewhere rather than being parked-up during the move."

Although six-crew cabs are nothing new, the Bespoke team has designed the cab in such a way that the payload is not compromised and a

five-box load can be accommodated without the need for an expensive non-standard chassis.

**"Building our own trailers rather than buying them in from a third party means that we have full control of the production process..."**

John Sturt

As well as building bodies to order, Bespoke also stocks a range of ready built vehicles for deliver off-the-shelf. The company also offers removals companies the option of long-term contract hire as an alternative to outright purchase.

● [www.bespokebodies.co.uk](http://www.bespokebodies.co.uk)

## £170 million plan to dual vital Somerset road

**D**river will see quicker, safer and more reliable journeys in Somerset under government plans to tackle congestion on the A303. The key route between Sparkford and Ilchester is being upgraded to relieve the over-congested road and create 30 miles of dual carriageway between Mere and South Petherton.

The £170 million plan is part of the government's £15 billion investment in motorways and major A roads between 2015 and 2020 – the biggest in a generation.

More than 26,000 vehicles use this stretch of road a day, double the number it was designed for, and dualling the route will cut journey times and new junctions will enhance safety.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said: "Almost four million trips are made on the A303 every year and we are investing more than £2 billion to improve these motorists' journeys, making them quicker and safer. Tackling congestion on this vital road will also help boost the economy in the south-west, unlock thousands of jobs and homes and promote tourism."

A consultation on building a tunnel for the A303 near Stonehenge is also underway. This will further improve journeys on the main road between London and the south-west. Further details on upgrading the A358 between Taunton and Southfields will also be revealed shortly.



● The plan includes a possible tunnel for the A303 underneath Stonehenge.



## LACK OF INVESTMENT TO BLAME FOR POTHOLES SAY TRANSPORT ASSOCIATIONS

The Freight Transport Association (FTA) has reacted with disappointment to the Local Government Association's (LGA) inaccurate claim that freight transport is responsible for the poor state of Britain's roads.

Instead, FTA has called on central government to reverse the downturn in spending on local infrastructure, which has caused a 14-year repairs backlog across the national road network.

Christopher Snelling, Head of Policy at FTA commented, "Freight levels on our roads are still not back to the pre-recession totals of 2006, so the LGA's assertion that HGVs are solely responsible for the increased number of potholes on Britain's roads is incorrect. Larger lorries do not cause increased damage to the road surface – in fact, they have more axles which spread payloads more evenly."

Meanwhile, Road Haulage Association Chief Executive Richard Burnett said, "Many of our worst roads have little or no HGV traffic, while many of the best are used by HGVs all the time. Many other European countries have far better road surfaces despite facilitating the movement of hundreds of thousands of HGVs. In addition, there are an increasing number of 60-tonne lorries operating on continental roads causing very little, if any, damage to the road network."



● FTA and RHA dispute claims that HGVs are solely responsible for potholes.



● Ford testing at the Lommel Proving Ground.

## Real time pothole warning system

Costly car repairs could be avoided with the help of an ingenious virtual pothole map being developed by Ford.

Testing is due to start later this year. The map will show drivers, in real time, where potholes are, how bad they are, and suggest alternative routes.

Last winter is expected to set records as the worst ever in some parts of Europe, with freezing temperatures, ice and snow likely to lead to more cracked and potholed roads. Bad road surfaces contribute to more than a third of all accidents every year.

In the UK alone, a pothole damage claim is received by local authorities every 17 minutes – with claims averaging £432. In 2011, 20 million potholes were reported in Europe, but only half were filled.

"Our cars already feature sensors that detect potholes and now we are looking at taking this to the next level," said Uwe Hoffmann, Research Engineer, Advanced Chassis Control Technologies, Ford of Europe. "A virtual pothole map could highlight a new pothole the minute it appears

and almost immediately warn other drivers that there is a hazard ahead."

Ford models including Galaxy, Mondeo and S-MAX already use on-board sensors for Continuously Controlled Damping with Pothole Mitigation, which detects potholes using sensors and adjusts the suspension to help reduce any potential damage.

**"Our cars already feature sensors that detect potholes and now we are looking at taking this to the next level ..."**

Uwe Hoffman

Engineers are now researching the use of cameras and embedded modems, at the Ford Research and Innovation Centre, in Aachen, Germany. Together, these technologies would gather detailed information on the potholes and beam it to the 'cloud' where it can be made available to other drivers – in real time.

Further research is also exploring the use of an active suspension system designed to massively reduce the severity of bumps and rough road surfaces.

Ford tests new cars on a nightmare 1.2mile road at Lommel Proving Ground, in Belgium, using replicas of some of the world's worst potholes.

## Tough new penalties for mobile use behind the wheel

New penalties announced by the Department for Transport to punish drivers for using a mobile phone behind the wheel came into force on 1 March, 2017.

Offenders now risk a £200 fine and six driving licence penalty points for texting, making phone calls without a hands free kit or using social media whilst driving.

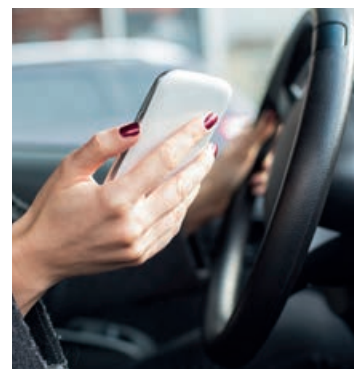
Motorists who are caught for the first time will no longer be offered the opportunity to attend a driver awareness course instead of receiving points on their licence

and newly qualified drivers risk having their licence revoked.

The new rules apply in England, Scotland and Wales, with drivers caught breaking the new law for a second time potentially facing a £1,000 fine and a six-month driving ban.

### Editor's note

What about all the other daft things people do while driving? See David Jordan's story on page 22.



● Offending drivers face a £200 fine and six penalty points.

# The top five hot topics for global mobility in 2017

Advancing technology, sociological change, political upheaval and economic shifts are combining to make 2017 a challenging and fascinating year for those in the global mobility industry, says Crown World Mobility's Lisa Johnson.

**I**n some cases there are new concepts emerging for those who manage global mobility programmes as more and more corporations look to send staff on assignments to build global experience. At the same time, processes that were seen as cutting edge even one or two years ago now appear as popular trends.

In any given year, of course there are emerging topics and evolving issues in what is a dynamic field – 2017 is no different. It is an exciting time to be a global mobility professional.

Here are five top trends and focusses which could help shape the year:

**A study by information technology consultancy Intuit predicts that by 2020, 40% of American workers will be independent contractors.**

## 1 Increasing desire to close the gender gap by attracting more female assignees

The number of female assignees creeps and crawls forward, with some progressive organisations, industries and regions moving faster than others, but the reality is that overall the percentage of female assignees is still hovering around 20% after more than a decade talking about it.

Like any diversity and inclusion (D&I) strategy, the only way to change behaviours and make an impact is to drive the change from the top down and develop a culture where inequality is unacceptable and actions are taken to ensure inclusion.

The pressure on corporations to look more deeply into reasons why women are not being engaged – and make changes from the top to address it – is growing. Not least because global companies and future leadership development increasingly requires employees to have global experience and competencies.

The barriers in place for women may include unconscious bias (an assumption, for instance, that women may not want to accept an international assignment), the length of assignments (and the preparation time for them) and lack of understanding of the impact of dual careers and responsibilities in modern families.

As a result, expect to see more flexibility and support for family and spouse/partner needs; changes to communication and upfront decision making support to include identifying and addressing potential family barriers.

## 2 Reacting to the gig economy and its impact on mobility

The gig economy concept has been a growing discussion point in HR for a few years now. In some industries it is a common business model already. The gig economy reflects a work environment where temporary contract positions are common and companies use independent workers to fill short-term engagements.

The growing gig economy is expanding outside its more traditional industries. A study by information technology consultancy Intuit predicts that by 2020, 40% of American workers will be independent contractors.

That is a big leap for any country's employee population. This year we will be talking about gig employment mobility policies, compliance challenges, the emerging industries that compete globally for gig talent and the locations where it is becoming more common.





### 3 The simplification of policy documents

We are at a turning point in how mobility policies are communicated. This is the year to start simplifying (or doing away with) the 30-40 page documents.

Leading the way over the past few years has been having information available via websites and apps. There is less and less patience, especially from those employees who were born with smartphones in their hands, for long, text-heavy documents.

Infographics, animation and other visually appealing mediums are being applied to traditional HR documents and mobility has lagged behind in this area.

### 4 Taking advantage of technology's impact on mobility

No one needs a trends report to know that technology continues to change our day-to-day lives in so many ways.

In 2017, the industry is inserting virtual solutions into mobility to support or replace assignment planning, pre-decision trips, home-finding solutions, pre-move home surveys, etc. Virtual solutions can save time and money.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) can simulate human conversations in the form of 'chatbots' to offer support that falls somewhere in between a really good FAQ list and a conversation with an expert. These technology advancements add a cool factor to the mobility industry, though they do have their limitations.

This year we will see growth in the advantages that technology brings, and yet we predict that we will also see an increase in discussions around the limitations of technology. Companies have very real concerns around the risks that technology brings and are working hard to prevent cyber breaches and protect employee data.

### 5 Reacting to political uncertainty

This final topic is not so much a trend as an example of how outside influences affect our industry.

There are many parts of the world where political instability exists; however, this year, the two countries that are consistently at the top of the list in terms of the volume of international outbound and receiving locations (the US and UK) are undergoing political transitions that are creating uncertainty for many companies doing global business. There is the potential for great change.

Brexit appears to be moving forward in the UK and extracting itself from the more than 40-year-old relationship with the EU. But it will be neither quick nor easy. So far, the message from the British government is a rejection of the free movement of people, goods, capital and services. While the process may take at least two years, the business community is already responding.

## Should the new government strategy at all reflect the campaign promises of last year, we anticipate a less immigration-friendly environment ...

On the other side of the Atlantic, the US is undergoing a political transition for which there is no modern precedent. Should the new government strategy at all reflect the campaign promises of last year, we anticipate a less immigration-friendly environment, fewer government regulations on some business issues (i.e. banking oversight, the environment, equal employment opportunity, diversity & inclusion), whilst at the same time enforcing an anti-globalisation policy that could include potentially punishing US-headquartered companies that act on a global strategy. Recent examples in the US automotive and defence industries are confirming a potential return to a long-dormant US isolationism attitude.

**Lisa Johnson is Global Practice Leader, Consulting Services, at Crown World Mobility.**

● [www.crownworldmobility.com](http://www.crownworldmobility.com)



**SURVEY: EXPAT SCHOOL FEES**

# Affordability of international schools for expats survey

Relocation resource website ExpatFinder.com has published the results of its annual worldwide survey of international school fees.

**T**he study examines the increasing financial burden of premium education for children of expat parents and calls for companies to re-evaluate their global mobility programmes to better support relocating families.

The market survey involved 707 international schools across 98 countries. The annual survey also captures sentiments around international school fees to not only highlight challenges for expats, but also opportunities for companies to remain attractive to foreign talent.

"According to our survey findings, international school fees are steadily rising, particularly in markets that are popular destinations with expats," said Sébastien Deschamps, CEO and Founder of ExpatFinder.com. "It is not surprising therefore to see expat parents rethinking their entire approach to their children's education. For example, we see more and more parents considering options such as home schooling or enrolling their children in local schools that offer internationally recognised curriculum."

Based on 6th grade tuition fees per country, China (US\$36,400 per annum), Switzerland (US\$28,300 per annum) and Belgium (US\$27,800 per annum) come out tops as the most expensive countries for international education. Following closely behind with fees above US\$20,000 per annum were the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, United States, Singapore, Malaysia, Austria and Australia.

## TOP THREE MOST EXPENSIVE FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION (PER ANNUM)

CHINA:  
\$36,400

SWITZERLAND:  
\$28,300

BELGIUM:  
\$27,800



**"It is not surprising therefore to see expat parents rethinking their entire approach to their children's education."**

Sébastien Deschamps

Stephen Park, Head of Global Mobility at Fonterra said, "Some cities, such as Hong Kong, are particularly challenging for our mobility programmes. At times, it is competitive to get children into good schools and I imagine some employees may turn down assignments in Hong Kong for the sake of their children's future. It just shows how important education assistance has become inside mobility programmes."

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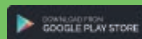
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## NEWS: ON THE ROAD



● The government has clarified the insurance position with regard to self-driving cars.

## DKV offers fuel and toll invoicing for Georgia

DKV customers can now settle fuel costs in Georgia using the DKV CARD at selected WISSOL brand fuel stations. At these stations they can also pay the Georgian toll charge for transit transport vehicles (Road Toll Card) quickly and securely.

"Georgia is an important transit country on the north-south axis

between Russia and Turkey," said Deniz Çokco, DKV Sales Manager Turkey. "Therefore, we are delighted to offer our customers an en route purchasing solution for fuel and tolls along this primary transport corridor."

The WISSOL stations can be found in the route planner DKV MAPS and the DKV APP.

## New insurance rules for self-driving cars

Since the first time self-driving cars were discussed, one issue has been a primary concern: who's to blame if there's an accident.

Now the UK government has clarified the position in the hope of encouraging the testing and use of more self-drive cars. Measures around insurance for self-driving cars will ensure better protection - a single insurance product for automated vehicles will now be able to cover the motorist when they are driving, as well as when the car is in automated mode. This will mean innocent victims involved in a collision with an automated vehicle will have quick and easy access to compensation.

The measures follow a consultation by the Department for Transport on the issue of insurance for self-driving cars that closed in September 2016. The Secretary of State will be given the power to classify which vehicles are 'automated' and subject to the

new insurance requirement.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said, "Automated vehicles have the potential to transform our roads in the future and make them even safer and easier to use, as well as promising new mobility for those who cannot drive. But we must ensure the public is protected in the event of an incident and today we are introducing the framework to allow insurance for these new technologies."

David Williams, Head of Underwriting at insurance giant AXA UK commented, "This is a positive step forward that provides clarity to insurers to ensure we design our products appropriately. It keeps protection of the general public at its heart which we hope will encourage early adoption of some really impressive technology."



● WISSOL fuel station.

## Transparent fuel prices across more of Europe

Fuel and service card provider DKV Euro Service is offering its customers even more up-to-date price information across more of Europe with fuel price data from Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Portugal now available on DKV products.

"We welcome the decision of the authorities to make their data available for our products," said

Dirk Simon, Head of Fuel & Payment Authorisation at DKV Euro Service. "With more price transparency comes higher added value for our customers." Until recently, fuel price information outside of Germany was based on transaction data from fuel card providers. As a result, customers had no current price information about less frequented fuel stations.

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## How to help expatriates settle into their new life abroad

Nicola Meier, of Inspired Coaching and Training Ltd in the UK, says it can take up to two years for an expat to feel fully at home after moving abroad. As most contracts only last for three years at the most, that doesn't leave much time to enjoy the experience. Here are some suggestions as to how you can help them.

**N**icola said that there are two key factors that can influence the way an expatriate family settles down: internal and external.

### The external

These are things such as housing, employment, finding a job for the spouse, finding the right school for the children and building a social network. According to Rhiannon Davies, a communication and publishing consultant at BritishExpats.com, the external factors (mainly supported by the relocation agent and moving company) can be arranged quite quickly.

### The internal

This is mainly what the expatriates think about. How good are they at adapting to change? How resilient are they and how fast can they bounce back? How open minded are they to new relationships and cultures? It is about the mind-set and how much they can manage to see the opportunities, focus on the solutions and enjoy the transition. This takes longer to adjust to than purely external factors.

Within the first month the external factors are mostly settled. The expats have found their house and the kids are in school. Whereas it may take up to a year to feel at home for the first time and up to two years until the expat calls someone he knows a 'friend'.

As keeping the settlement time short is so important, and to make the journey an enjoyable one, what can help expatriates better manage the internal factors?

### Three tips to think about:

**How would you feel?** Ask yourself, what would help me? Being aware of the challenges yourself will already make a difference as to how you interact with your clients.

**Identify what's important.** With every move the environment and the possibilities change and so do the priorities in an expat's life. External factors such as work permits, language skills, the age of children, etc. change with every assignment and influence what is possible. Having to figure that out on your own takes time, so helping your clients to identify what is important can help them to take action in the right direction.

### Focus on solutions instead of problems.

Imagine two canoes going down a very rough stream. One is focussing only on the safe spots he has to paddle to and gives all his power to get there. The other is focussing on all the dangerous spots trying to avoid them. Who do you think will master the challenge better? Right! The one who focusses the energy on the safe spots. The same is true for an expatriate. When moving abroad everything the expatriate does is new. There are many new threats, but also many new opportunities. The more you can help your clients to focus on the possibilities, on what they want and on solutions, the more they will see the good things happening in their life and the faster they will recognise the positives.

The more you can integrate the internal factors in your mobility support, the more you gain credibility and add outstanding value to your client. Helping them to make that stay abroad the best experience ever.



### Nicola Meier

Nicola helps expatriates with her company Inspired Coaching and Training Ltd to thrive when change is happening and to make the experience abroad the best of their life. Expats gain resilience to master the challenges on the way and add value to the assigning company.

Contact Nicola at [nicolameier@inspiredexpatcoaching.com](mailto:nicolameier@inspiredexpatcoaching.com).

## NEWS: PRODUCTS



● Items from the Britwrap SeaDry desiccant range.

The product works by immediately binding with any excess moisture in containers or storage units to form a gel, promising to reduce relative humidity by up to 50%. The pouches can absorb more than 200% of their own weight and are considerably more effective than silica gel and desiccated clay. The product range has five variants:

- SeaDry Single: recommended for use in boxes or small spaces.
- SeaDry Hook: equipped with a strong hanging hook, it is recommended for use in spaces of approximately 25ft<sup>2</sup>.
- SeaDry Pole H: designed to be hung horizontally and is recommended for use in spaces of up to 50 sq feet.
- SeaDry Strip: with a rear adhesive strip it offers flexible positioning and is recommended for use in confined spaces.
- SeaDry Blanket: designed to be laid flat and is recommended for use in tightly packed containers or storage units.

SeaDry is a high performing desiccant which has been thoroughly tested and is already being used by a number of highly reputable companies. Martin Ellioth, Managing Director of Weir & Carmichael, said: 'We are delighted to add SeaDry to our protective packaging range. It's a fantastic, high-quality product sure to benefit the removals and storage industry.'

● **SeaDry is available to buy online at [www.britwrap.com](http://www.britwrap.com). For further information, or for bulk order enquiries, call 0151 934 1250.**

## Britwrap moves in on desiccants

Liverpool-based protective packaging brand Britwrap has introduced new moisture-absorbing desiccants to its product range.

**T**he new products follow the company's entry into the removals materials market with its range of heavy duty protective packaging and its reusable mattress bag.

The new products are marketed under the German brand 'SeaDry'

which helps to eliminate damage to goods caused by excess moisture. Moisture damage occurs when there are fluctuations in temperature, e.g. day/night, this causes any water locked up within storage goods to liquefy and form condensation. Condensation can occur at any time

but is a particular problem when goods are being shipped through different temperature and humidity zones.

The company says that SeaDry has been specially formulated and packaged to prevent damage to goods during transport and storage.

## New VGM weighing systems for Hyster® ReachStackers

Hyster has introduced two weighing systems that can be fitted to Hyster ReachStackers and Laden Container Handlers to obtain a Verified Gross Mass (VGM), as required by the recently introduced SOLAS Legislation.

**T**he new Hyster Static and Static Plus systems are quick and easy to use, cost effective and have limited impact on container throughput. At the touch of a button the operator sets into action a pre-programmed lift cycle to obtain the VGM. Using a screen display in the cab, the ReachStacker or Laden Container Handler operator can quickly input container identification and have a time stamped VGM attached to it. VGM data can be saved to a data module or printed using an in-cab printer, and 3G or WiFi



● The new systems have limited impact on container throughput.

options are available on some models to deliver data to the Terminal Operating System. For maximum flexibility, the system display can show Gross, Tare and Net weights.



● The operator can begin a pre-programmed lift cycle that obtains the VGM with the touch of a button.





● Tori Ferrante (centre) with Bob Bowen (left) and Tom Doyle.

## New president and chairman for Crown as Tom Doyle retires

Crown Worldwide Moving & Storage in California announced recently that its Board of Directors has appointed Salvatore (Tori) Ferrante as president and chief executive officer, effective immediately.

**B**ob Bowen, Crown's CEO for over nine years, will be assuming the role of chairman of the Board and Tom Doyle, one of Crown's original investors, will be retiring from that position.

Tori joined Crown in 1985 as a corporate sales executive. He spearheaded Crown's move-management software integration, instrumental in Crown's merger with Armstrong Relocation's family of companies. He currently functions

as the head of the international division for Crown and Armstrong. A strong voice in his industry, Tori is presently president of the US Section of FIDI and a director of OMNI. Tori is also very active in the ERC and other industry associations.

"It has been inspiring to watch Tori grow over the years, both as a leader in our company and in our international associations, where he is well respected by his peers," said Bob Bowen. "Tori has proven to be even-keeled, making decisions based on gathering all the facts and placing emphasis on providing quality to our customers and training for our employees."

Bob was one of the early investors in Crown. He ran the international division for 30 years before becoming CEO in 2008. During that time he served on the OMNI (Overseas Moving Network International) Board and in 1994 founded OSA (Overseas Shippers Association), a non-profit organisation dedicated to helping its 200 members negotiate effectively with the global ocean carriers to move household goods and related commodities.

Tom Doyle has been a calm leader for Crown in a tumultuous industry. Tom will remain on the Crown Board of Directors. "Crown represents 45 years of my life," said Tom. "Being part of a startup was challenging and its growth has been exciting. I am proud of Crown and know that the company will grow and prosper under this new management structure."



● Adam Kellaway.

## ADAM KELLAWAY JOINS THE BOARD OF BASIL FRY

Insurance specialist Basil Fry & Co has announced the appointment of Adam Kellaway to the Board of Directors. His role will be as technical director and account executive with responsibility for global markets.

**A**dam brings to the Board a wealth of experience gained in his previous employment at QBE and Marsh, where he worked on global programmes from both an underwriting and technical perspective. Previously Adam also worked as an account executive at Basil Fry for six years.

Adam is a Chartered Insurance Broker, having completed a first-class degree in insurance, achieving ACII status.

"I am very excited with the opportunities this position provides," said Adam. "Basil Fry has grown dramatically since my previous employment with the firm and I see a great deal more potential within the UK and further afield. I'm looking forward to meeting as many clients as possible over the coming months at industry events as well as enhancing our insurer relationships to provide further benefits for our customers."

Adam took up his new position on 1 February, 2017.

## Gerson Relocation appoints Andy Elson as director of sales

Gerson Relocation, part of the AGM Group, has announced the appointment on 20 February, 2017 of Andy Elson as director of sales.

**A**ndy began his career at Harrow Green specialising in commercial office relocations. From there he spent time with Sterling Relocation and was latterly responsible for business development at Santa Fe Relocation Services in the UK.

During his career within the corporate relocation sector, Andy has been involved in serving and managing the global relocation and moving requirements of corporations and internationally mobile individuals.

Paul Evans, AGM Group Chairman said, "We are delighted Andy has joined our team and he will play an instrumental role in developing Gerson Relocation. Andy's position will add to our penetration of the marketplace and growth opportunities. We welcome Andy to our team, and wish him huge success."

Andy Elson also commented, "Joining Gerson Relocation brings an exciting opportunity to work with a real emphasis on quality and service delivery. I am



● Andy Elson.

looking forward to focussing on providing the excellent relocation management solutions that I know clients continue to need."

## NEWS: PEOPLE

## Jeff Mason moves back to moving

Well some might say he never left it, but Jeff Mason, who has spent the last few years representing Moveware in the UK, has moved home and teamed up with Conroys to be the company's general manager in Australia.



● Jeff Mason (left) and David Conroy.

Jeff has spent all his working life in the moving industry but, some time ago, felt like a change. "I wanted to spend time away from the industry and at the same time stay connected with

it in some way," he explained. "Moveware fitted this criteria and importantly was a real challenge I enjoyed – great people and a very impressive product."

When he left London his intention

**"I've known David for many years, having first visited their Napier, New Zealand, facility in 1988, and have been impressed with their growth ..."**

Jeff Mason

was to retire and, maybe, do some part-time work. "But David Conroy and I had a number of conversations where he outlined a role he felt would be a good fit for me within the business. I've known David for many years, having first visited their Napier, New Zealand, facility in 1988, and have been impressed

with their growth as they have extended their coverage in both NZ and Australia and at the same time maintained a quality service."

Jeff said Conroy's use of technology to help manage their business (yes the company does use Moveware), and a strong focus on operations and service delivery, have been the driving factors to date. "With a strong core business my role as general manager for Australia is to embrace and build on the current culture while working towards a more sales-driven business."

David Conroy is obviously delighted that Jeff has joined the company. "Jeff is a true professional of the industry and the opportunity for him to be a member of our executive team, with his many years of expertise and enthusiasm, is really exciting for us all."

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## The White & Co Mystery Mover

Congratulations to John Inkpen of Britannia Sandersteads who spotted the sadly missed Rick Neave last month. Taken (far) too early. This time the subject is very much extant, although he doesn't look too pleased with life in this photo. Who could it be? If you know, you could be the winner of the White and Company Red and Black Watch. Answers please to editor@themover.co.uk.

## Robin Proctor to be next president of CILT

Robin Proctor FCILT is to become the next president of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) in the UK.

He will take up the one-year presidency from Will Whitehorn FCILT on 12 May at the CILT President's Inauguration.

Commenting on his appointment, Robin said, "It is an honour to be chosen to become president of CILT(UK). I hope to play an active role in leading change and promoting CILT's influence as we head into this exciting era for the logistics and transport profession."

CILT(UK)'s outgoing president Will Whitehorn said, "It has been a privilege to be president of CILT during a year that has produced so many momentous events. I am delighted that Robin is to become the Institute's next president and I look forward to working with him closely to continue to drive the culture of innovation within logistics and transport."



● Robin Proctor.

Robin Proctor's career spans supply chain and e-commerce roles with some of the UK's biggest FTSE 100 and 250 retailers, including Sainsbury's, Iceland, Booker, MFI/Howdens, Wickes and Travis Perkins.



## Death announced of Arun Shiva Ramachandra

Ajit Venkatesh, Director of Globe Moving in Bangalore, has informed *The Mover* of the sad and untimely death, from cancer, of his fellow Director Arun Shiva Ramachandra. Ajit explained that Arun was heading the company's International Marketing Division for nearly a decade before moving into the realty and investment sector. "He will be greatly missed but we will endeavour to keep his spirit, passion and dreams alive," he said.



● Arun Shiva Ramachandra.

## Michelle Wiggetman joins Cartus

Cartus Corporation has announced the addition of Michelle Wiggetman as Director, Strategic Business Solutions.

Michelle has over 25 years of experience in relocation management services and will be responsible for new business development in the US northeast region.

"We're thrilled that Michelle has joined our team," said Kathi Feczko, Senior Vice President of Sales. "In addition to her experience working with Fortune 500 companies she has an exceptional knowledge of the relocation industry's overall operations and markets. Her



● Michelle Wiggetman.

expertise will be a great benefit to companies within her territory – and to Cartus, overall."

## Matt Andrisani joins Voerman Group

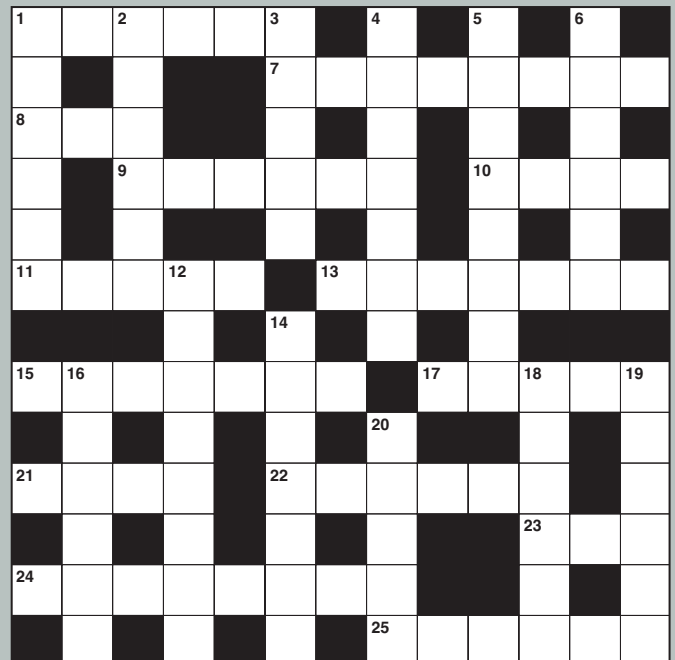
Matt Andrisani has joined the Voerman Group. Matt has experience in working at an RMC (Relocation Management Company) and has a background in client services, account management, business development, household goods moving, destination services and supply chain.

Matt will be managing relationships with both RMCs and key global accounts.



● Matt Andrisani.

## Puzzles



### ACROSS

- 1 Hawk (6)
- 7 Ruled with authority (8)
- 8 Health resort (3)
- 9 \_\_\_\_ shower: eg the Perseids (6)
- 10 Donated (4)
- 11 Dance club (5)
- 13 Selfishness (7)
- 15 Football official (7)
- 17 Growl with bare teeth (5)

- 21 Second Greek letter (4)
- 22 Long mountain chain (6)
- 23 Precious stone (3)
- 24 Dependence (8)
- 25 Benefactors (6)

### DOWN

- 1 Opposite of pulled (6)
- 2 Stage plays (6)
- 3 \_\_\_\_ on: encouraged (5)
- 4 Mediocre (7)

- 5 Scare (8)
- 6 Departs (6)
- 12 Ornamental climbing plant (8)
- 14 Greek wine (7)
- 16 Small hole (6)
- 18 In slow time (of music) (6)
- 19 Assumed propositions (6)
- 20 Stitched (5)

					8		6	3
				5		1	9	
		6		1	4			
							4	
	4	2				8	5	
	5							
			3	7		6		
	2	8		9				
9	7		4					

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## MARKETPLACE/DIARY DATES

# Diary Dates

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## FIDI General Assembly

8 March, 2017, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

## OMNI Conference 2017

10 – 14 March, 2017, The Seychelles

## LACMA Convention

23 – 26 April, 2017, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

## Britannia Conference

21 – 24 April, 2017, Sorrento, Italy

## The Commercial Vehicle Show 2017

25 – 27 April, 2017, NEC, Birmingham, UK

## EuRA Conference

25 – 28 April, 2017, Warsaw, Poland

## Young Movers Conference

11 – 13 May, 2017, Riga, Latvia

## Self Storage Expo Asia

16 – 18 May, 2017, Hong Kong

## BAR Conference

18 – 20 May, 2017, Cardiff, Wales, UK

## EUROMOVERS International Conference

25 – 28 May, 2017, Edinburgh, UK

## MöLo International Trade Fair

14 – 16 September, 2017, Kassel, Germany

## IAM 55th Annual Meeting

9 – 12 October, 2017, Long Beach, California, USA

## European Self Storage Conference and Trade Show

16 – 18 October, 2017  
Maritim ProArte Hotel, Berlin

## FEDESSA European Conference & Trade Show 2017

17 – 18 October, 2017, Berlin

## The Movers & Storers Show 2017

8 – 9 November, 2017  
Hanger '42, Bruntingthorpe Aerodrome, UK

# Puzzle solutions

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# Did you know?

We've dug up a few facts that we thought you may (or may not) find interesting.

Clyde Tombaugh discovered Pluto in 1930. His ashes are aboard the NASA probe *New Horizons* that is currently studying the planet.

Las Vegas hosts an award ceremony for people who make awards.

Selfies kill more people than sharks.

1 in 16 of the words you encounter every day is 'the'.

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## Tony Allen: And finally ...



# Don't make me laugh!

I must tell you this!

I don't know if I've mentioned it before, but I spend some of my time playing in a ukulele band – as an aside: somebody once said that the definition of the shortest unit of time is the difference between you meeting Tony Allen and him telling you that he plays the ukulele!

Anyway, I play in a ukulele band and the other night when we had our AGM our revered leader was expounding how we should really be 'increasing our performing credibility by taking on more complicated and meaningful songs which would of course require more expertise'. He went on to say how this was what discerning audiences required these days; and in a general discussion that followed it was decided that this was how we should proceed, and the proposal was minuted with all due solemnity. At no time did the word pomposity enter into the discussion.

Next item on the agenda was a forthcoming event at the local library in which we would be taking part. A copy of our song book had been fittingly handed to them with a suggestion that they chose a selection of songs which they would like us to play.

Our leader had received, just before he left home, an e-mail from the chief librarian (poor joke alert) who had originally 'booked' us. It itemised their song choices and apparently he had not yet had a chance to read it. With a degree of ceremony, the list was produced, and with a slight change of facial colour to a moderate puce, accompanied by a scarcely hidden splutter, he announced that the first song which they had chosen was ... *TEDDY BEAR'S PICNIC!*

Now I know that a sense of humour can vary from person to person but I must confess that I fought hard to swallow a burst of laughter - along with around 50% of those present. The rest of the room, in varying proportions, failed to appreciate the delicious sense of irony involved here - and so the meeting continued in a mixture of indignity and mild hysteria.

Somebody asked what the next choice was. Now our revered leader is not one to hold back on his views but somehow he was finding it difficult to speak and had a look on his face which gave the impression that he was chewing a wasp, but finally he was able to announce the next choice ... *PUFF THE MAGIC DRAGON!*

Oh lordy lordy! Apart from the fact this banal song sounds like a game that hippies used to play during the drug enhanced sixties, I can't begin to tell you the effect that this had on the room. All thoughts of

improving our credibility etc. had now completely disappeared amid a combination of snorts and scarcely repulsed amusement. I formed the initial impression that maybe our leader was not at all amused, but in the end I think that even he saw the funny side of this situation.

It did make me think about how preoccupied we often are with the concept of 'meetings'. It doesn't seem to matter whether we are running the country or discussing a ukulele band, we still like to go through the appropriate procedure and I think we are obsessed with the whole idea. Of course we have to accept that a meeting normally moves at the speed of the slowest mind in the room. There is always somebody with verbal diarrhoea who insists on passing motions.

The political philosopher Thomas Sowell once said that people who enjoy meetings should never be in charge of anything and maybe this makes sense, but how important is 'a sense of humour'?

I always remember the late comedian Bob Monkhouse saying, "When I was young they laughed when I said I wanted to be a comedian – well they're not laughing now!" Lovely.

## The political philosopher Thomas Sowell once said that people who enjoy meetings should never be in charge of anything ...

In our meeting I'm sure that the whole thing was becoming overblown – it's a little old ukulele club for goodness sake. Humour seemed to bring us all back down to ground level and destroy any pretensions.

"Well you can't make a joke out of everything," I hear you say, "what about ambition?" Well yes that is true, but entertainment is an infectious quality which is born out of a combined sense of enjoyment. This quality also applies to businesses in general, you can always tell when a company is populated by people who enjoy what they are doing and this is normally manifested by a smile. A happy company is a happy bank manager? Perhaps not, I've never met one.

So there you are, I hope that you can see the humour in this ukulele story which I assure you actually happened. I read only yesterday that there are three basic rules to writing a magazine article. The trouble is nobody knows what they are!

By the way, I sincerely hope that our band leader doesn't read removal magazines!





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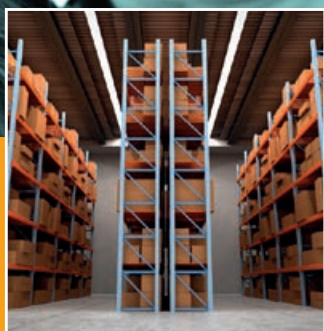


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