



ENTREPRENEURIAL SHIP MANAGEMENT

For the past 40 years, Doris Maritime Services, a Swiss company located in Geneva, has grown methodically in the ship management sector building up a reputation as a flexible, adaptable and entrepreneurial ship manager always positioned to tackle the ever-changing market. Filomena Nardi reports.



If you are looking for a competent ship management company which understands the market, ships and its crews, you may want to consider Doris Maritime Services.

According to its CEO and founder, Mr Nicolas Wirth, this Swiss company specialising in the management of ocean-going vessels, in particular, container feeder ships and bulk carriers, can ensure the safe, cost effective operation of investors' assets and assist them to maximise the return on their investments at minimum risk.

"A good ship manager understands how and where to locate viable opportunities, what must be done to insure that profits during the investment are maximised and when they should be liquidated," said the CEO. "We are not just a ship management company - we are entrepreneurs. What I mean is that we are proactive. We look for new opportunities, we source funds and assets and we develop

new projects, rather than a typical ship management firm that goes from a shipping company to another, to try to raise interest and sell its services. Clients recognise our entrepreneurial approach and this is what set us apart from the rest."

Ship Management at its Best

Graduating from the well-known Cardiff University, after ten years at sea and eight more working as director for a giant ship management company, in 1983 Mr Wirth decided to start his own venture in Geneva, Switzerland. "At the beginning Doris was involved in the equipment leasing business and we used to sell to many companies," recalled Mr Wirth. "As we went on our core business shifted to ship owning. We had several ships, but during the past years we have sold them all."



By the time the last ship was sold in 2010, Doris Maritime Services had already established itself as a valuable ship management partner. “Managing ships has been our primary activity since 2002,” affirmed Mr Wirth. “Today, we have a broad experience in crewing and managing virtually all types of vessels and we can also offer a wide range of additional services which includes inspections and surveys, supervision of new buildings, management of floating structures, back office support, chartering and post-fixture, and operational and technical risk assessments. We basically provide what our motto says: ship management at its best.”

In addition to crewing and technical management, Doris also develops and participates in shipping investments, co-investing with individual and institutional investors, raising equity, arranging bank financing and commercial employment.

A Crew that Makes the Difference

Responsible for the management of over 20 vessels, the business has grown internationally thanks to the establishment of technical management offices in Amsterdam and Malta; the acquisition of

sister companies Naess Ship Management BV in Amsterdam, and a participation in Pearl Grace in Manila, as well as agents in Shanghai, Mumbai and Odessa.

“We certainly are an international business today and our client base spreads across Western Europe, South America, the Far East and the United States,” noted Mr Wirth.

Although technically independent of Doris, both Naess Ship Management and Pearl Grace complement the core business with crewing services.

“From our offices in the Philippines, the Sub-Continent and Eastern Europe, we train our crew to the levels we demand. We are aware that only by employing highly experienced, qualified and professional seafarers we can provide top quality products and services,” remarked Mr Wirth. “We have 24 shore staff between the offices in Europe and in Manila and approximately 500 currently at sea. These crew members are the main reason why our company has been successful over the years. A ship owner can have good finances and good technical developments, but having a good crew is absolutely essential.”



Flexible and Adaptable

Over its years of trading, Doris has not only acquired an in-depth knowledge of the container-shipping sector but has also developed two important skills: flexibility and adaptability.

“The maritime world is changing at an ever increasing pace so ship owners actively seek ship managers who can adapt to changing circumstances and environments, embrace new ideas, who are enterprising, resourceful and adaptable,” explained Mr Wirth. “We are naturally adaptable and flexible. Our competitive edge is being a small but very hands-on company, where everybody is involved in making sure the business runs smoothly. Compared to big organisations, we have a much more personal relationship with clients and crews, and we can rapidly sort out any of our clients’ issues. Additionally, we have a global network of agents that are able to assist with commercial operations, crew changes and local authorities worldwide.”

Whenever the market was giving out alarming signs, Mr Wirth said his company was ready to recognise them and change route to avoid any imminent storm.

When in 2008 the container shipping market was hit by the financial crisis, Doris proved to be both flexible and adaptable, responding to new challenges by increasing its fleet in the bulk carrier sector as well as implementing new actions to improve the company’s efficiency.

“During our 33 year history, we have observed market trends and acted accordingly,” said Mr Wirth. “In recent years, we have invested into several newbuilds, we have reorganised our company’s management structure and implemented various improvements, such as new software. We are also increasing our drive into acquiring new tonnage for specific customers.”

Whilst the company continues to focus on its growth, Mr Wirth remains vigilant towards the future. “At the moment, the bulk carrier and container vessel markets are quite challenging. That said, they are both bound for a recovery, but the question is when. However, unfortunately I don’t have a crystal ball and it is difficult to say exactly what the focus will be in the long term. Our long term goal is to continue reviewing the market and look for new profitable opportunities and with our experience and a little bit of luck, we will continue to strengthen our position as an entrepreneur in the merchant navy.” ■

