

MOVE IT LIKE...



- YEAR FOUNDED**
1988
- SPECIALISMS**
Road freight (groupage, full & part loads), warehousing & logistics, ecommerce fulfilment, fashion logistics
- TURNOVER**
€69 million
- EMPLOYEES**
424
- LOCATIONS**
10 European office locations (UK, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania & Moldova)
- MAIN TRADE ROUTES**
Europe wide
- MODES**
Road, sea, air
- AWARDS**
BIFA European Logistics winners (2012), National European Business Awards Champion (Lithuania), TIL (Transport & Logistics) Brand Leader Award (Serbia)
- EXPANSION**
Aiming to expand organically and by acquisition

STEPHEN BLYTH, DELAMODE GROUP

STEPHEN SAYS...

“We always like to promote within where possible and to give people the opportunity to progress.”

So, Stephen, how did you get into the freight industry?

I am actually a chartered accountant by profession and was brought in to control the audits for two UK subsidiaries of the Frans Maas Group. After supporting the MD in running the business the Chairman called me in for a meeting and said, 'I'm going to make you an offer you can't refuse.' If you've ever seen the first Godfather film you can imagine what I was thinking! Instead, the offer was to be CEO of his Company and I ended up running the UK business for four years, turning it around from a loss making, to a profitable enterprise...

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Q How did you make Delamode a reality?

A I approached a formation company about buying a company off the shelf. I really liked the sound of a company called Dalamode but by the time I went to make the purchase it had gone. With a background in fashion and garment-on-hanger transport I decided to call it Delamode, or 'of the fashion' in French. It seemed to fit well.

Q What happened next?

A That was back in '88 and we started working on a textiles contract from Belgium to the UK. I spent the Summer working from home with my badminton partner at our desks in our shorts and generally having a good time whilst working hard. I thought, 'if we lose this contract we'll be in trouble', so I said to myself I'd better get some more clients.

From Belgium we moved into Holland and then Malta, growing our client base and getting our name out there.

Q How has the company developed between then and now?

A For the first decade of the 2000s we concentrated on securing large, high-value contracts and working with like-minded companies to deliver logistics solutions.

Since 2011 the focus has been on developing our European road transport network restructuring the company and evolving the Affinity Transport Solutions side of the business. Geographically the company has been strong in connecting East with West and continues to push the boundaries. Most recently we announced new routes into the Caucasus regions.

STEPHEN SAYS...

We cut our teeth on Romania in the 90s, which opened our eyes to the further opportunities throughout Eastern Europe

In the last five years we've created dedicated divisions and service offerings that allow us to deliver tailored solutions for our customers: Freight Forwarding, EshopWedrop, Pall-Ex Romania and Affinity Transport Solutions.

Q What is your strongest service offering?

A First and foremost, we will always be a freight forwarder known for specialising in Eastern Europe. The strategy has been to open up our own offices rather than use agents and as a result we currently have premises in ten countries, mainly in the Baltics and Balkans regions. We cut our teeth on Romania in the early 90s, which opened our eyes to the further opportunities throughout Eastern Europe and we will use our experiences to expand further.

Q Romania is a key geographical stronghold for Delamode, how did that come about?

A We went into the market as an East European and North African specialist and our first customer was a fashion producer in the UK who asked if we would pick up half a load of trousers from Romania. We did the first shipment for him and built a relationship from there. Once we had some business going to and from, it became a matter of securing more and growing from there. Once we were established in Romania we moved into Bulgaria and I embarked on a trip around Europe meeting customers and establishing partnerships. Since then it has gone from strength to strength with the opening of offices and expansion of our services throughout Eastern Europe.

Q How did the partnership with Pall-Ex come about?

A I've known Hilary many years, back to the 80s in fact. We took the franchise for Pall-Ex Romania in 2011 and we started that effectively in January 2012 moving 864 pallets in our first month. We budgeted to make a loss in the first year but by the end of year two we had a profitable franchise. We're now moving around 30,000 pallets a month and the business has had fantastic growth - and that's just in Romania. We have also won the franchise for Pall-Ex Hungary and operations are due to start in the first quarter of 2017.

Q Any plans to move into other countries?

A Most definitely, we are always looking to expand and evolve our service offering. We have a long-term plan to further strengthen our West Balkan coverage with the opening of offices in Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Albania and Greece to name a select few countries. We intend to replicate the success and experiences we have enjoyed with our existing offices.

Q Most people will know you for your European Road Freight offering. What other divisions are there within Delamode?

A We currently have four key divisions: freight forwarding, logistics, Affinity Transport Solutions division and EshopWedrop which was created this year.

Q What does your Affinity Transport Solutions division consist of?

A Our Affinity division consists of a number of products and services aimed at making life easier for our Eastern European hauliers. Affinity is established in Romania, Moldova, Serbia and Macedonia, with plans to expand our offering over the course of the next three years. We offer fuel cards, cross-channel ferries, breathalyser kits, GPS Solutions and are expanding into Affinity leasing and insurance. We are even launching a truck trading website in the near future. Our philosophy is to make Affinity a one-stop shop for our haulier customers.

Q Tell me more about the new Truck Traders website

A We are calling it Affinity Truck Traders, with plans to launch in the next couple of weeks. Truck dealers in Europe, Affinity customers and haulier suppliers can advertise their trucks on the website and they will be available to purchase by our Affinity customers. It is a great way of connecting a wide range of vehicle dealers with our existing customers, as well as giving us the opportunity to cross sell our range of services.

Q You mentioned e-commerce, what are you doing to expand this side of the business?

A e-fulfilment is a key focus across our industry and a significant part of everything we now do. As always we look to play to our strengths and this year we launched EshopWedrop which was created to help consumers in Eastern Europe shop online from Western European e-tailers. Since Delamode is already delivering significant shipment volumes into Eastern Europe, it has been relatively straightforward to accommodate B2C deliveries alongside B2B groupage services.

Q Can you explain how EshopWedrop works?

A EshopWedrop is a drop box business for B2C customers outside of the UK to save money on European delivery. For example, a customer can purchase a product from a UK online retailer using our warehouse as a delivery address. We will then ship it on our frequently departing B2B groupage trailers to the consumer's country, where they can collect their products or have them delivered at their home address. Launching primarily in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Romania, with options to buy in the UK, Germany, Poland and Italy, we are looking to expand this offering across Europe and Africa.

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Q What has been your biggest challenge in developing Delamode?

A In the early days it was simply cash flow! Setting up a business from home wasn't easy but was quite good fun, really. People wanted to come and meet me but I would never let them because I didn't have an office. These days if I can get people to come to me, all the better.

Q What's your biggest achievement?

A Winning the Pall-Ex franchising in Romania is a big one for us I think; and securing the partnership with DKV Euro Service which has now been working well for over 10 years. On a personal note I am very proud of the success we have had in growing and expanding and I am hopeful we can do more.

Q How has the market changed for Delamode?

A It's a very competitive market, anybody can hire a van and go and do some transport. These days with the European community you can travel across the borders without customs clearances. When I started there were boundaries, so a lot of domestic transport companies in the UK didn't go overseas because you had all these customs issues and running trucks on carnets, etc. As soon as we put the EU together we suddenly had one big domestic market where you didn't need anything special so we've had to adapt to maintain our market share.

STEPHEN SAYS...

I am very proud of the success we have had in growing and expanding.

Q Can you describe your company culture?

A There is a real family culture and ethos of togetherness. Our staff across the Group are very involved in charity and team building events; they have climbed Mont Blanc, run marathons... There's been a bit of a domino effect, where everyone else has decided they need to get involved! We also circulate an internal newsletter which we share with key customers so everyone knows what we are working on. I think a real strength of the company is the range of skills and experience across the workforce. Members of staff are able to share their expertise with colleagues – you definitely need to be a team player.

Q Where is the next generation of forwarders coming from?

A Our Lithuanian office has established partnerships with local universities where they go in to those universities, do talks and get to meet people who will graduate and do work experiences and internships there and then move on to full-time jobs in the industry. A large number of these stay and are employed full time by Delamode. We are rolling out this model throughout the group at the moment, as well as implementing graduate training schemes and internships.

Q What staff training and development do you implement?

A We always like to promote within where possible and to give people the opportunity to progress. Another thing we like to do is to offer our overseas staff the chance to learn new languages and hold regular training workshops within offices. They can bring their regional knowledge and we can offer them development.

Q What's in your five-year plan?

A A real focus over the next five years is to develop our air and sea freight offerings, ideally through acquisition. We're hoping to buy businesses where we can drive synergies in markets and sectors where we are already working. We are also looking at opening some more offices in Eastern Europe: Albania, Greece, Belarus, Ukraine... we have big plans.

Q What's your favourite part about working for Delamode?

A It's always nice when something works. You come out with an idea and everyone looks at you thinking, 'what is he planning now?', but then you get it going and you see it working. That's enormously satisfying.

