

# User-friendly and transparency

## are the key buzzwords

By Helen Jauregui

**Procurements, safety management, crew training, accounts and technical supervision are a small selection of shipmanagement responsibilities where an efficient approach can improve overall fleet performance.**

However, without an appropriate system, these key managerial issues have the potential to become a paperwork or email burden, in which thousands of messages, statistics and other vital data must be recorded, stored and reviewed in a proper fashion.

Now, as a number of marine software developers offer fresh solutions to streamline management processes, shipping companies are keen to invest in these more user-friendly and transparent systems.

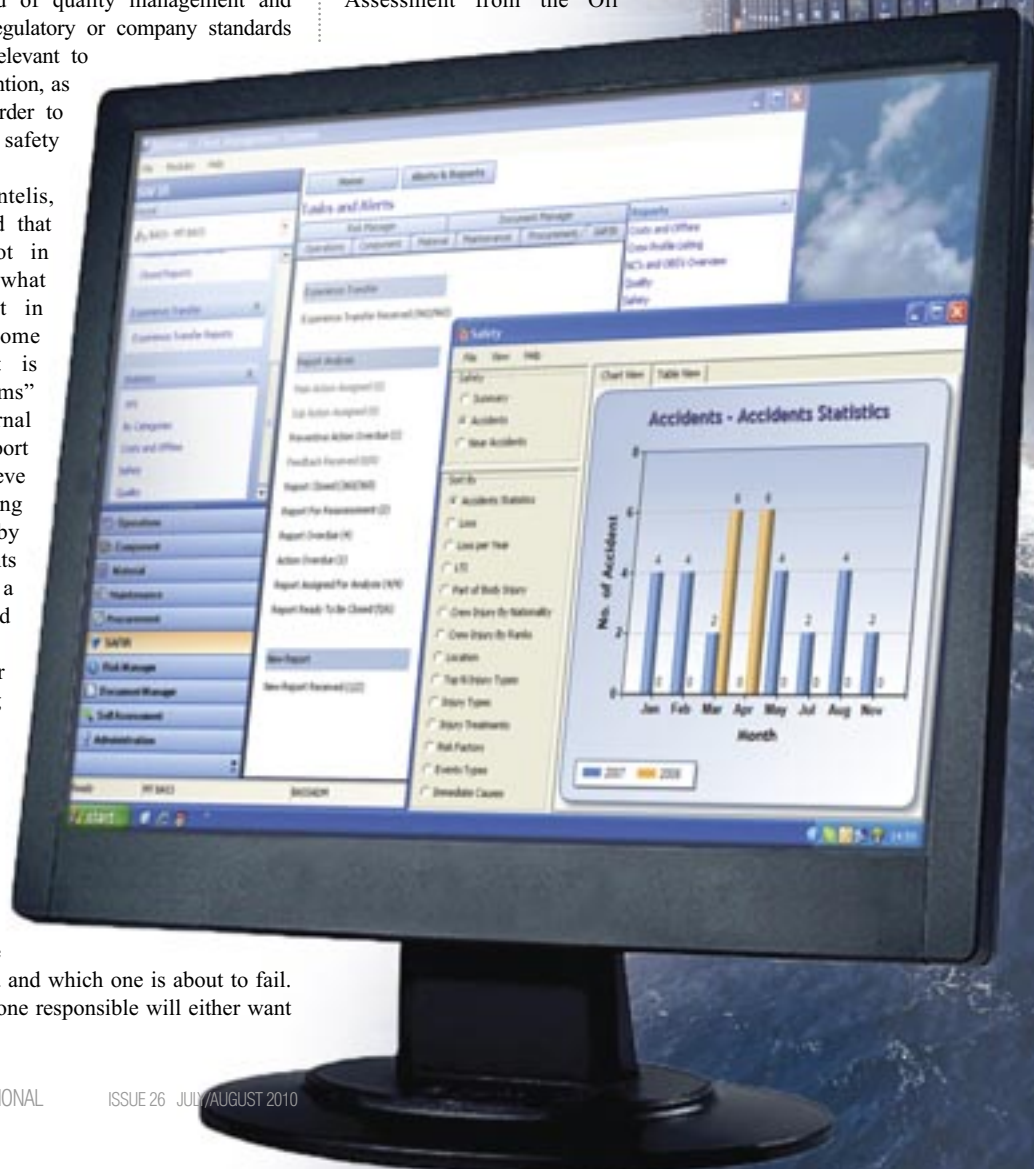
For ship managers, this new wave of software represents a valuable progression in the field of quality management and aspirations towards maintaining regulatory or company standards across fleets. This is especially relevant to issues of safety and accident prevention, as companies can analyse data in order to better understand and improve safety records.

However, Panteleimon Pantelis, director of Ulysses Systems said that those in the industry “are not in widespread agreement about what constitutes quality management in practice”. He added that “some feel that quality management is about safety manuals and forms” and “compliance with external authorities” such as charterers or port state controls, whereas others believe it concerns “corporate learning and risk management”; whereby “observations and undesired events are discussed enthusiastically with a view to learn from them and improve process”.

Mr Pantelis cited the danger of reporting and categorising undesired events “without any concern for how this will help solve the problem, minimise the risk and find the root cause”. He added: “In many accidents and near accident reports, there are questions about the particular hazard, whether it is fire, injury, containment etc. Rather more relevant is what process has failed and which one is about to fail. These are the questions that someone responsible will either want

to be helped with or at least want other people to know about.”

Such concerns over software and the management of safety issues are closely linked with the responsibilities of shipmanagement companies in conforming to regulations. Within its Task Assistant Platform, Ulysses Systems has created a software model which assists compliance with Tanker Management and Self Assessment from the Oil



Companies International Marine Forum. Mr Pantelis said: "TMSA, and especially chapter 12, incites us to rethink whether documents and statistics are good business indicators or not; chapter 12 being the TMSA chapter that talks about comparing internal audits with external audits. This comparison no doubt helps oil companies keep track of whether the company monitors its own operation more closely than external inspectors and auditors.

"At Ulysses we have built a model within our software that makes it easy to apply the right categories to data without burdening the user with huge lists of potentially relevant criteria that take more time to record than it is worth. He added: "In the information age, the information collection problem having been solved, what we now need is to solve the information categorisation problem. Never was this more relevant than today when the obstacle of access to information is behind us."

In response to this desire for transparency of information across fleets, there is now a clear trend within the marine industry for integrated systems which deliver an accurate, real time and comparable overview of data and activities. One company dedicated to integrated software is Norwegian developer BASS, whose BASSnet system (pictured) is used on over 1,200 ships by customers such as K Line, Stolt Tankers, Pacific International Line and Wilhelmsen Ship Management.

Haakon Dalan, general manager for product management at BASS, said: "An integrated suite allows for better reporting and analysing of your operation and enables you to compare crew performance and training against fleet performance or safety statistics. If performance issues arise, you can analyse the training the crew has received and consider this in connection with other factors, then share relevant data with recruitment bases and manning agents."

### **The Liberian flag estimates that over the past two years, its electronic seafarers' application has saved ship owners and operators more than \$4m in courier expenses alone**

Mr Dalan added: "Traditionally in shipping companies, each department - be it crewing, purchasing, technical superintendancy or accounting; would select a piece of software for their specific needs but fail to think across departments. This can lead to a patchwork solution, with applications for specific purposes only,



which cannot communicate with each other and therefore do not allow for efficient processes between departments and do not provide the necessary tools for management to analyse data and improve business performance."

Gino Fiore, sales and marketing director at technical management software specialist MESPAS also emphasised the importance of sharing information in order to improve and streamline operations. His company has developed the Mespas R5 (pictured); a fully integrated system which offers essential tools such as planned maintenance, document management, budgeting, system and data security and TMSA II.

Mr Fiore said: "We have an open system architecture, which from a technical perspective, allows for easy integration with third party systems both onboard and ashore. For example, there is a market trend towards condition-based maintenance, so companies are looking to upgrade for more intelligent equipment which continuously measures and monitors technical performance of machinery – we have the ability to integrate our system to those various sensors and controllers."

He added: "Whenever a ship owner or operator has an audit, be it in the tanker industry by an oil major or other regulatory

body, it is about extracting by the push of a button in a condensed format all the relevant information which the auditor is looking for. No matter how many vessels there are in a fleet, we are able to extract information related to standard procedures or continuous improvement. This is a very important key element for ship owners



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and managers – they need to show the auditing authorities how they are striving for continuous improvement. All this information can be accessed in a condensed report.”

**“You need all purchases and prices for your inventory arranged so that at any time, staff on board and in the office can have a better overview” Svein Pedersen, Noah**

As more advanced systems are developed, ship owners and managers are also utilising this technology to minimise administrative costs. The Liberian flag estimates that over the past two years, its electronic seafarers’ application has saved ship owners and operators more than \$4m in courier expenses alone. SEA is a web-based application, designed to increase operational productivity and transparency of data when certifying and documenting seafarer applications – money saving functions which are a common concern for many of the software developers who spoke with Shipmanagement International.

For example, Texas-based provider ABS Nautical Systems recently launched the NS5.5, an upgraded version of its NS5 suite of integrated fleet management software modules. The suite is designed to synchronise management systems, operations and crew details whilst having a positive impact on costs. Joe Woods, vice president, global sales and marketing described the cost benefits when making procurements; from requisitioning onboard to creating an invoice at the end of the stream: “A couple of years ago,

we had clients who were spending upwards of \$125 just to place an order, but now they’re able to get that figure below half of that cost. If you’re placing thousands of orders a year and saving \$50-\$60 per order that will add up fairly quickly.

Understanding the financial advantages of such systems when ordering, shipmanagement companies are also keen to discover a more simplified approach to stock control once supplies are onboard. Svein Pedersen, chief executive of shipmanagement company Noah said his team had purchased a web-based fleet management software solution from Singapore provider Teledata Marine. Mr Pedersen emphasised the need for a proper, planned maintenance system of fleet inventory, without which “it becomes very difficult to have an organised overview of what has been done as you don’t have the history.”

He added: “You need all purchases and prices for your inventory arranged so that at any time, staff on board and in the office can have a better overview - you can also easily control the actual cost of your inventory to minimise or optimise your purchases, based on what you have onboard.” This is an important issue, since without proper record-keeping, crew are likely to order items which their ship already has, leading to a surplus of stock. Mr Pedersen also noted that such systems can prove useful when purchasing emergency items and vital spares as having access to a breakdown of stock information can allow for surplus items to be split between vessels, thus minimising costs for the fleet as a whole.

This desire for web-based management systems is inevitable in a modern climate where internet access is a tool on which most of us rely. Stephen Fletcher, commercial director of AXS Marine highlighted the fact that shipping companies get thousands of messages everyday which need to be managed efficiently.



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**“There is a third parameter which is cost because browsing the internet onshore is not an issue but if you have to do it through an expensive satellite link then obviously you don’t want to give it to people to do casual browsing or download videos and music as these things cost”** *Savvas Lambidonitis, Columbia Ship Management*

He noted that many companies are moving away from bespoke messaging systems built on outdated technologies and choosing to embrace internet-based decision making solutions such as AXS Marine’s AXSDry, a set of online tools and databases which includes access to statistics and public information databases where crew can gain current data regarding ports, fixtures and bunker prices.

Mr Fletcher stressed that most individuals use the internet every day for a wide variety of purposes and added: “Generally today, any company that doesn’t have access to the internet can’t do their business.” This need for internet communications in order to conduct business activities - coupled with an increasing demand onboard for social networking and entertainment sites such as Yahoo, Facebook and YouTube – has led shipmanagement companies to consider how and when internet access should be offered onboard.

Many will be keen to ensure that existing facilities are not abused, while those not currently offering internet access are considering the incentives and financial implications of purchasing satellite connections.

Savvas Lambidonitis, IT manager at Columbia Shipmanagement, said young crew members are keen to have internet access onboard but that unfortunately, his company is unable to provide this service with current communication systems. Mr Lambidonitis emphasised the technical problems of vessels not having the infrastructure for internet access and also raised concerns about security, since downloading may lead to viruses which can damage essential tools such as stability and landing programmes.

He added: “There is a third parameter which is cost because browsing the internet onshore is not an issue but if you have to do it through an expensive satellite link then obviously you don’t want to give it to people to do casual

browsing or download videos and music as these things cost.”

Providing internet access onboard for leisure purposes remains a contentious issue but British maritime e-commerce platform ShipServ has devised a system which proves that social networking principles can benefit mainstream business activities. John Watton, chief marketing officer explained how business users can connect and share information online by creating ratings and reviews on ShipServ Pages; part of the company’s existing TradeRank system. Mr Watton said: “TradeRank was devised to indicate a supplier’s popularity and is based upon a supplier’s activity on TradeNet. A high TradeRank indicates that the supplier is widely used by the ShipServ TradeNet buyer community.

“The addition of reviews aids the sourcing process, giving buyers further information on which to base their decisions” Mr Watton added. When crew connect to TradeNet using onboard management systems such as ShipNet, SpecTec and Danaos, they can generate requests for quotations to multiple vendors and receive quotes into their systems which can be turned into purchase orders, without duplication or manual intervention.



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Contributing to the issue of software accessibility, Mark Jennings, operations manager at British company Marine Software Limited stressed the need for systems which don't "hinder the task which a seafarer was employed for in the first place". He said: "The ongoing problems are simplicity; trying to keep it simple for the seafarer so that even without training they can use the software with relative ease."

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Mr Jennings referred to his company's new system, the Marine Crew Manager, which will assist in ensuring full visibility of crew members' certifications for different levels and ranks. He said: "The focus has got to be on the level and skills of the engineers on the vessel and not to overburden them with software which is highly complicated."

Overall, as software developers offer increasingly simplified approaches to data control, quality management is likely to become better accepted by crew as a process improvement method, rather than simply dismissed as a time consuming bureaucratic burden. ■



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