

Logistics Worldwide

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## Air &amp; Ocean Partners

# A fully-fledged cooperation

The forwarding network Air & Ocean Partners wants to expand, as well as boost sales between the members and offer new services.

Air & Ocean Partners (AOP), the international forwarding cooperation of small and medium-sized companies founded only two years ago, already has 167 members in 69 countries. Membership is expected to rise to 200 by the end of this year. «We don't want endless growth though,» underscored managing director, Viktor André Fuchs, during a discussion with the ITJ. «The ideal size that we envisage is around 250 member firms. Above this size communication within the group becomes very difficult.»

AOP is an open network. «Members are not obliged to do business with each

other, but we continuously attempt to promote and increase sales within the group. The greater the volume of business that members companies do together, the stronger their link to the network. That brings sustainable stability,» the manager declared. «Members are only permitted to participate in one other alliance at most. That is the limit we set.»

## Personal talks

The managing directors of Air & Ocean Partners are Helmut Gross and Viktor Fuchs, who both have a forwarding industry background, and who jointly operate a highly specialised forwarding firm themselves. They founded the AOP network as a limited company in Munich (Germany), and then installed a very stringent selection procedure for candidate companies. «We make a personal visit to each potential new mem-

ber before accepting the enterprise. In addition to establishing concrete facts like a firm's financial standing, we also weigh up soft factors such as the ability to cooperate and the willingness of the owner and/or management to make a personal contribution to the network. Two members per city or metropolitan district is the maximum number we allow,» Gross stated. «We have a waiting list. It indicates that we have already made a name for ourselves in the industry.»

Member companies are not shareholders, nor are they represented in the management. They can leave the organisation if they are discontented, or speak out at members' meetings, which are held twice per year. «We meet in Munich every September and go to the city's renowned Oktoberfest. The spring meeting is held on different continents.



**Viktor André Fuchs,**  
managing director

Asia (the Philippines) was chosen this year. Next year's meeting will be held in South America.» We focus on exchanging information, as well as on networking. «This year we are holding a workshop on the topic of security certification. Every country has different regulations or interpretations of the laws and directives, even in the EU. That creates a great deal of confusion.» Most of the firms that are united under the AOP umbrella have be-



**Helmut Gross,**  
managing director

tween ten and 100 employees. «They tend to have fewer staff in Europe and more in Asia,» Fuchs explained. «It reflects the higher personnel costs in Europe.»

#### **Broad range of services**

A trust fund that covers damages up to EUR 15,000 for business between AOP companies is one of the services that the network offers its members. In addition, debt recovery support is available.

Members are obliged to pay invoices from other member firms within 30 days. Infringements are published. The country-specific information service on the cooperation's internet site is particularly appreciated. This service is continually updated with new information from member firms. Furthermore, employees are able to obtain information about how to fill in a bill of lading or an air waybill for country X or Y, or discover where to go when they are obliged to or need to fumigate a consignment etc. The profiles of member firms are also stored on the portal.

#### **Exploiting the cooperation**

«We primarily concentrated on developing the network in the first two years. In future, we want to increasingly focus on other topics, such as the joint purchase of transport capacities, insurance and more. One of our top priorities is to negotiate the purchase of seafreight capacities with shipping companies. Cooperations enable small and medium-sized companies to wield power in the market and we need to exploit this fact,» Fuchs summed up. *ufs*

[www.ao-partners.com](http://www.ao-partners.com)

Photos: Air & Ocean Partners



**Air & Ocean Partners**



**Independent  
midsized  
forwarding  
agencies all over  
the world  
get together to  
one network.**

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