

SHOWCASING THE WORLD OF EXHIBITIONS

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showcase

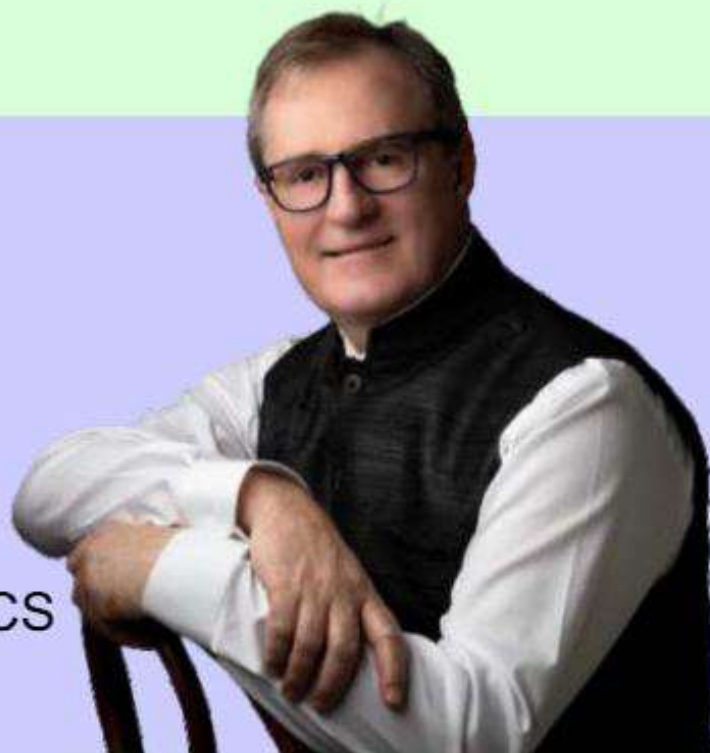


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IN CONVERSATION WITH**PATRICK REJAUD
PRESIDENT & CEO,
WORLD EXHIBITION LOGISTICS**

ES. Tell us a bit about your journey into the world of logistics and how that crossed paths with the exhibition industry?

Patrick. I left school at 16 and started working in the air freight transport business at the age of 19, thanks to a job advertisement. This was the only time in my life that I applied for a job. I had neither the qualifications, nor any work experience when I arrived in Paris. I started at the bottom of the ladder as a customs clerk then an assistant declarer and finally a customs declarer at Orly and Roissy CDG airports.

From then onwards, I received job offers that I refused, as I felt my fate was elsewhere. One day an exhibition forwarder contacted me with a job proposition. He knew me because I had settled several of his customs problems (his returning freight was never the same...). I accepted the position, making it clear that I did not know anything about exhibitions. A month later, I was on my way to Cairo to handle Peugeot's stand containers at The Cairo International Fair. It was a real adventure, the first in a long life in the exhibitions industry.

There were just two of us at the office. I was responsible for developing the defense sector of the company. My responsibilities included taking phone calls and handling sales, operations, travel and invoicing alike. Back then, nothing was standardized and each trip was a unique undertaking because, regardless of international regulations not adapted to trade fairs, we sometimes had to deal with the imposed forwarders who were not always reliable. So, I traveled between shows

across the US, China where cars were rare and traffic jams were caused by bicycles, Australia where it took me 30 hours to get to by plane, Japan with its endless but very instructive preparation meetings, Greece where it was necessary to show a lot of diplomacy and Turkey, one of the most difficult countries at the time. I even drove through the night in Saudi Arabia - from Riyadh to Jeddah - because the driver was tired, and we had another show the following afternoon.

After 5 years, I left to join another company where I both developed and consolidated the international agent network and opened the Russian market held at the time by a single competitor. This involved many trips to Moscow as well as Kiev, Almaty, Tyumen, in complicated and sometimes dangerous climatic conditions. It was just after the fall of the Berlin Wall, so we had to be careful. I was the French freight forwarder responsible for managing the French clients participating in the first Petroleum exhibition in Kazakhstan: KIOGE 1991. I could write a book on this experience alone, which was truly extraordinary.

ES. Please tell us about major milestones achieved and challenges faced so far in your exciting career in the exhibition logistics industry.

Patrick. I built my professional experience over 12 years and specialized in Middle Eastern and Asian markets. In 2003, together with a few colleagues, I set out to found World Exhibition Logistics (WEL) without a penny in my pocket.



We had no office yet and typed our ATA Carnet in one of my partners' garage. Our first IDEF 2003 show was challenging. For instance, we assisted our long-standing client (since 1987) at 6:00 am on the opening day by unloading our truck by hand because the military base of Etimesgut in Turkey was partially closed. Since then, WEL has grown a team of 12 people, handles up to 600 shows in one year (which is quite a number considering our team size!) and established its headquarters and warehouse in the vicinity of CDG airport. It is recognized worldwide among its network of independent agents and through the IELA association.

ES. *With more than 70% of your activity beyond France, WEL handles cargo to any country in the world in a wide range of sectors. How has the pandemic affected your organization and how have you evolved to lead in the new normal?*

Patrick. A myriad of companies the world over is facing dire situations, especially on the import side of the business, with no help from their governments. So, on the whole, we cannot complain. We have tried to live by Churchill's "never let a good crisis go to waste" and have taken advantage of the situation: we have maintained our storage activity, have developed exports of real goods to our customers (we can also handle dangerous goods) and have coordinated the logistics of private demos in France and abroad with ongoing multiple-country regional tours in the Middle East and Africa. Also, we have introduced the idea of pop-up showrooms in our warehouse; made an institutional video; developed new sales & marketing tools and kicked off WEL's ISO 20121 certification. Lastly, my son Jonathan recently joined the company as Development Director to give a new direction to the company.

Finally, a major recent achievement was being awarded a significant tender by one of the world's leading Defense companies with air, land and sea operations. WEL services have started and include all logistics around storage and shows, which means that we will be physically present on all major Defense shows worldwide. We hope to keep developing other win-win partnerships with the same level of closeness and

customer relationship.

ES. *In 2017, WEL was elected 2nd best Export agent at the annual congress of the International Exhibition Logistics Association (IELA). This was an astounding achievement – what did this mean to you and what led to this recognition?*

Patrick. It came as a great surprise and was of course a source of pride that we were elected 2nd best export agent by the IELA association in 2017. It was a recognition of the work accomplished in the past 14 years, our efficient team and the mutual respect between WEL and its network of agents. As we received the news on the day of the Paris Airshow dismantling, we took the first flight available to Prague in order to receive the prize. We reiterate our thanks to our partners who voted for us! I believe that human relations are essential in my profession, even though modern communication technologies tend to dematerialize all contact. At WEL, we strive to meet your needs. I think this award also reflected the demanding customer-service priority that we set out ourselves to.

ES. *What do you foresee as some biggest post-COVID challenges for the logistics business? What according to you would be the upcoming trends that will influence the exhibition logistics industry?*

Patrick. We will stay true to our vision whereby our clients are front and center. We will maintain our quality-of-service



catering to the specific needs of every client, which sets us apart from our competitors and well-known big groups and adapt our sales and marketing resources accordingly. We think fully virtual events will struggle to work, but we remain open to the new hybrid possibilities that these new technologies will bring to the market. But we think the industry will get back to the basics: face-to-face meetings.

ES. World Exhibition Logistics was also involved in AERO INDIA 2021. Please share your experience at the show.

Patrick. The tender I mentioned before allowed us to be present at AERO INDIA 2021, which marked a turning point after a lengthy hiatus in the exhibition industry. We did not know if the show would be maintained, as the freight capacities with the airlines were reduced and exhibitors could cancel their participation at any moment. But in the end, we were able to respond to our customers' demands thanks to the support from our local partner RE ROGERS INDIA, a long-time partner. Reviving the atmosphere of an in-person show felt great and it demonstrated that it is possible to organize shows during the pandemic, even with such bold measures as cancelling public days for visitors.

ES. IDEX/NAVDEX is also one of the recently handled projects post pandemic. Please share your experience there, volume of work handled and some photographs.

Patrick. We went to IDEX/NAVDEX in Abu Dhabi (21 - 25 Feb) with a huge workload and daily pressure coming from different angles: ongoing shipments canceled due to travel restrictions by the host country, exhibitors no longer coming, on-site restrictions, etc. This however was an excellent show for WEL: from small clients to market leaders - and goodies to armored vehicles - we handled more than 90% of the French exhibitors' freight (52 tons of cargo), had 5 delegates onsite for 3 weeks and managed shipments by air and sea for a total of a 7 month-project. We strengthened our relationships with the customers who trusted us, reconnected with agents and colleagues from all over the world. This show was a success thanks to our long-time partner Agility UAE, whose team provided us with great support during the entire show.

This was also the first time that Arquus' "SCARABÉE" - a hybrid armored vehicle - was transported abroad for an exhibition (see photos).

ES. Please share your experience/memories, how World Exhibition Logistics (WEL) managed to meet the requirements of Milipol Qatar by COMEXPOSIUM and made sure all the shipments from clients arrived in due course?

Patrick. We started by asking ourselves how to transfer goods from IDEX to Milipol Qatar. In December? Not possible. Then

in January, Qatar-UAE air-traffic reopened. We were ready and managed to transfer, despite only having 20 days between the closing of one and the opening of the other. This is a great example demonstrating WEL's responsiveness to client enquiries, our flexibility to the latest geopolitical developments and great relations with airlines & partners, even with sensitive files due to export licenses for sensitive material. We ended up managing 95%+ of French exhibitors' freight with 21 tons of cargo, had one on-site delegate for 12 days for a project that took us about 4 months of work. We even managed a local demonstration for an armored vehicle following the show.

All in all, engaging with our partners as well as with the organizers - COMEXPOSIUM & CCI Seine et Marne - and our local agent Premier Showfreight proved extremely fruitful. We would like to congratulate and thank them once again for their support and for maintaining the show, despite the COVID-induced restrictions.

ES. What would be your message to the industry and the key learnings from the worldwide pandemic?

Patrick. To conclude, I would like to say that we are ready for the recovery that is unfolding. We have put together a list of "16 measures to beat COVID", which contains some interesting elements gathered from our experience at the latest shows this year. This is a message of encouragement to our colleagues, clients and partners around the world: HANG IN THERE! The worst is behind us and we are looking forward to continuing working with you all.

