



Your 10-Minute Guide to Hiring the Right Freight Forwarder

A quick guide to choosing an ocean and air freight forwarding partner.



The transportation of your manufactured goods from the factory to your end customer is critical to running an efficient, successful business. With all the freight forwarders out there, how do you determine which is the right one to trust with your precious cargo?

While there are a variety of questions for determining what an ocean or air freight forwarder offers, these types of questions won't tell you how they will treat you as a customer or if they'll be proactive in trying to learn your business's unique needs and requirements.

To help you find the right-fit freight forwarder, we've created Your 10-Minute Guide to Hiring the Right Freight Forwarder. In this guide, we'll look at the real questions to ask a potential freight forwarder.



Key Questions to Ask a Potential Partner

Not all freight forwarders are the same. In fact, the services, tools, and options they offer can vary widely. Additionally, how a supply chain solutions provider manages your client-vendor relationship can have a significant impact on your business.

To get better insight on how a freight forwarder will work for you, ask the following key questions:

1. How and what will you communicate with me?

Say you need to get ahold of your freight forwarder. How will you do that?

Between email, social media and phone calls, contacting someone is easy, but that doesn't mean you'll get great customer service. If you have to wait two days for an email reply, or call an 800 number and speak to someone who doesn't know your account, you can spend a lot of time trying to resolve a problem.

2. Will I get an assigned account representative?

A freight forwarder that assigns a specific person to your account can make all the difference in ensuring your questions are answered and resolved in a timely manner. An assigned representative not only knows your account beyond what a computer screen tells them, they also know your industry and have a complete understanding of your specific requirements. They don't have to relearn your account every time you contact them and will already understand your shipping needs.



3. How involved will you be in my account?

When asking about your account, find out if they offer consultative services as part of the partnership. Ideally, they will guide you in choosing incoterms, advise sailing schedules to meet your deadlines, as well as communicate any issues or special requirements between you and your supplier or customer. Find out if they will be proactive in learning your business goals and in providing you information about your shipments or industry changes that could affect you.

4. What tracking or other reporting technology do you provide?

A good freight forwarder provides you with hassle-free tracking technology that not only tells you when your shipment leaves port and arrives, but also alerts you of any delays or changes — without you having to email or call them. Additionally, the ability to provide detailed tracking information down to the purchase order (PO) or item level provides important visibility into your company's supply chain.



5. How customizable and easy to use is the tracking or reporting system?

Today, flexibility is more important than ever. The days of calling your ocean freight forwarder every time you need information about your cargo should be long gone. A good global freight tracking system can save you hours on the phone and help boost your business's productivity.

Are you able to access tracking information via desktop, tablet and mobile?

This information will determine whether shipment visibility is relegated to a meaningless tracking number or a powerful tool in your day-to-day business.

What to Look for in a Global Freight Tracking System

What features should a good freight tracking system have?

- **Notification System**

Look for a tracking system that sends you notifications via email to inform you of any changes that might require your immediate attention.

- **Detailed Order Information**

A good tracking system not only gives you an ETA and a tracking number, it should also list purchase orders (POs) down to the item/SKU level. Another feature your tracking system should provide is the ability for you to store documents in the system, such as a commercial invoice, packing list or bill of lading.

- **Customization and Flexibility**

A good tracking system is customizable so each unique user (manager, warehouse staff, accountant, etc.) has their own login and only sees the information they need to see. A good tracking system should also allow you to generate reports and filter shipments based on specific data points, like the purchase order number or the SKU.

The ocean freight tracking system should also be PC and mobile/tablet friendly, so wherever you are, you can see the status of your shipments.

- **Data Integration**

A good tracking system can be integrated with other software, such as your business's ERP system. The tracking system can seamlessly push the information to your software, keeping your own system up to date at all times.

- **Support System and Automatic Updates**

Look for a tracking system that provides a way for you to contact your freight forwarder within the system itself via a message box or internal support system. Ask how often they make updates or add new features.

6. How do I know my shipments/company will be a priority?

Whether you have one less-than-container load (LCL) shipment or 500 full-container loads (FCL), your shipments are important and should be treated as such. But will you be a priority for a freight forwarder if you don't ship as much as one of their larger customers?

A simple way to determine if your freight forwarder will make you a priority is to ask if they have other customers with requirements similar to yours.

7. How will you add value to my business?

A freight forwarder partner should sit down with you to learn your business and create a set of standard operating procedures (SOPs). If you need additional services once your shipment reaches port, such as delivery to your warehouse or to your customer's door, your freight forwarder should arrange that for you. Not only that, your freight forwarder should learn your customer's requirements and work with you on meeting them so you avoid costly penalties or delays.



8. What is the strength of your network?

A freight forwarder's network is more than just what shipping lanes they have access to and what trade associations they're members of. Does the freight forwarder have relationships overseas that have on-the-ground knowledge? Local expertise and relationships are even more important when dealing with a crisis in the market, such as a port strike or massive congestion in peak shipping season.

9. How do you ensure I am compliant?

Your freight forwarder should work on your behalf to ensure your shipments are compliant. This means helping ensure your goods are classified correctly for customs (if they are acting as your customer's broker or coordinating with your own), and your importer security filings (ISF) are submitted in a timely manner to avoid penalties and delays. Are your containers being returned on time? Your freight forwarder should handle that for you as well.





Need your products delivered safely and on-time? Find out how Dedola Global Logistics can help. Schedule a consultation with our knowledgeable team today.

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