

Pharma Airports – A Key to Global Success? Setting the Scene

The past year has proven that the medical world is at the forefront of human innovation. The pharmaceutical industry is our weapon of choice against the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst simultaneously tackling other diseases, treatments and cures, thus extending our life expectancy age.

Whilst the developments and manufacturing of recent biopharmaceuticals are groundbreaking, the logistics behind it are often overlooked and ignored at board level, resulting in an undervaluation of a well-organised supply chain. With an ever-growing global population and rising demand in biopharmaceuticals, the logistics chain is coming under enormous pressure to fulfil. Add temperature requirements and fast delivery to the mix and you have a recipe for disaster.

One area where multiple pharmaceutical logistic stakeholders meet is an airport, where pharmaceuticals are shipped to all four corners of the world. At the airport stage we have multiple handover points between shippers, trucking companies, freight forwarders, ground handlers and airlines. All these handover points are critical stages where temperature excursions, damages, paperwork issues etc. can happen. Not all airports have the right type of infrastructure, transparency and standardised ways of working to handle time- and temperature-sensitive shipments. So it is vital to select the right partners.

The aviation industry is slowly adopting and listening to the pharmaceutical shippers, but it has to do it as a community, and not on an individual basis.

The Brussels Airport Story

Over the past ten years, the cargo area of Brussels Airport (BRUcargo) has been investing and innovating into the pharmaceutical airport eco-system, not only because of its ideal central location within Europe and its proximity to major pharmaceutical manufacturers, but because of its clear company strategy on enhancing

the pharmaceutical supply chain at its airport premises.

The first gap that needed to be filled over a decade ago, was the clear understanding of the pharmaceutical manufacturer's logistics requirements. Apart from networking and building relationships at pharma conferences, the airport kickstarted a forum that invited pharmaceutical manufacturers in one room, the BRUcargo pharma shipper forum, a bi-annual event. In this setup, the airport was able to identify key weaknesses, listen to essential desires and identify where it could add innovation.

A key topic that was evident in the BRUcargo pharma shipper forums was the lack of pharma standardisation in the air cargo industry. In collaboration with IATA and other stakeholders, a taskforce was launched to compile and create an encompassing programme that trains and validates pharmaceutical stakeholders in the air cargo industry, better known as IATA CEIV. BRUcargo currently holds the largest concentration of CEIV certified companies globally and has implemented this programme into its strategy.

Besides working on the CEIV programme, investments have been made in modernising our infrastructure. Currently, over 30,000m² of pharma-dedicated cold storage facilities are in operation at BRUcargo, with the vast majority being brand new. A pooled fleet of airside pharma transporters has been added to a list of airside investments, along with a clear focus on digital innovation through the BRUcloud. Digital solutions such as the Pharma Acceptance Dashboard allows stakeholders to visualise pharmaceutical shipment performance at the airport and intervene when issues arise, making transparency a key priority.

These recent innovations and investments gave us a pole position during the COVID-19 pandemic, making Brussels Airport the first airport to distribute the COVID-19 vaccines globally, with millions of doses currently flying out on a weekly basis. And it doesn't stop there: an investment has been made in an enhanced digital solution to fully map and visualise the journey of each pharma shipment at BRUcargo. This will

enable stakeholders to react before issues arise and add full transparency towards the pharmaceutical manufacturer.

Collaboration – Key to Optimising Pharmaceutical Logistics by Air

Apart from local airport initiatives into the pharmaceutical supply chain, international collaboration within the air cargo industry is key to further optimise pharmaceutical logistics. One organisation in particular, Pharma.Aero, is pushing to achieve global pharmaceutical excellence in the air cargo industry by launching select projects.

One of these recurring projects, for instance, is the corridor mappings, where a route is mapped between airport A and airport B, thus identifying weaknesses and strengths. This enables all parties involved in the project to improve or strengthen their pharmaceutical supply chain and make that specific lane robust and reliable for the move of sensitive pharmaceuticals.

After all, building relationships with customers and airport stakeholders will evidently lead to fruitful partnerships. Just like Jeff Bezos once said, the same applies to the air cargo industry; *"we innovate by starting with the customer and working backwards. That becomes the touchstone for how we invent"*.



Samuel Speltdoorn

Samuel Speltdoorn is a Cargo Business Development Manager at Brussels Airport. His main responsibilities are the future developments of the pharmaceutical segment, one of the key strategic focus areas at Brussels Airport. Samuel is actively involved in various Pharma.Aero initiatives, such as the airport to airport corridor validations, Project Sunrays and Project CEIV 2.0. Samuel chairs the BRUcure COVID-19 vaccine taskforce and moderates the Air Cargo Belgium pharma steering group.