CPS helps industry drive to electronic air waybills

If the air cargo industry is to achieve IATA’s targets of 22 percent of e-AWBs by end of 2014 and 80 percent by the end of 2016, then small to medium-sized forwarders are going to need an easy way to enter those details.

For the many forwarders who do not have the capability to send EDI messages to carriers, a web-based solution is the best option. As it happens, such a solution is readily at hand. Forwarders using Cargo Portal Services (CPS), the Unisys-backed online portal, already enter quite a lot of shipment data to make their bookings with carriers such as Air Canada and Delta. A new service will allow them to go one step further, and create a complete master air waybill on those and other carriers.

The latest IATA XML standard for carriers running LMS, or as a Cargo-IMP EDI message for other carriers.

The new function will be simple to use. Once a forwarder has made their booking, the user will be asked if they would like to create the master air waybill. If they choose to do so, a new screen will show the information they have entered already and the extra fields needed for the IATA e-AWB. This data will be fed into the carrier host system – using the latest IATA XML standard for carriers running the Unisys Logistics Management System (LMS), or as a Cargo-IMP EDI message for other carriers.

Paul McLean, IT manager for Air Canada Cargo and one of the key proponents of the change, says that a lot of forwarders are keen to use the new function. “Especially for domestic Canadian shipments, this will be the only document the shipment needs,” he says.

“Forwarders see a big benefit in getting rid of a piece of paper that can get lost or damaged, and a step saving in being able to input data to us through CPS.”

Virgil Polinske, Director of Logistics Solutions, adds that the change will give small to medium forwarders the same capability as larger forwarders such as Kuehne + Nagel who are providing host-to-host e-AWB connections using the IATA XML standard.

McLean is certain the new function will be a vital tool to help Air Canada’s drive to meet the IATA targets, and he also expects it to drive up CPS usage overall. “In Canada around two thirds of our shipments are already booked on CPS. I think this new function will be a selling point that will enable us to raise that percentage substantially,” he says.

Another important part of the program from Air Canada’s point of view will be to improve the accuracy of data provided, with McLean saying the carrier plans to work closely with forwarders on this point.

“We will be pre-validating data a couple of days before the cargo arrives, making sure for example that it has the appropriate postcodes and shipping address details, and then working with forwarders to eliminate any issues,” he says.

“This will help us deliver full service benefits by ensuring that we get good data into our system early and that it is accurate from the start.”