

Keeping Things Moving: Tips on Finding a Rapid Response Service

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By Thomas Dunn, CSI Aviation
In the oil and gas industry, one broken piece of equipment in the field or on a rig can be a big problem. With equipment down in the field, an entire operation can be jeopardized, and the financial cost to the company grows with every hour and day that passes. Broken equipment needs to be fixed immediately.

But what happens when a replacement part isn't within arm's reach or even within the same state or country? The clock still ticks and the afflicted company bleeds money until somebody figures out how to fix the problem.

In this business, equipment failure is expected, so having a contingency plan in place to minimize downtime is essential. That's why it's absolutely critical for oil and gas companies to find an aviation management company that offers rapid response services to ensure that replacement equipment can be shipped quickly, handled properly once it reaches its destination, and then moved from the hangar to the

worksite in good order. (See Figure 1).

While a company can try to manage its own rapid response services, it's best to seek professional help because of the many risks involved. This is especially true for a company that needs to transport equipment across international lines.

Stringent airport restrictions, customs requirements, and over-flight permits are just some of the logistical challenges that, if not handled appropriately, can cause a major problem. (See Figure 2). Lack of aircraft knowledge and of services specific to moving cargo could also cost the company significant money that it could have otherwise saved.

And those are just a few reasons to seek professional help.

Most rapid response services are offered through aviation support and logistics companies, but what each company can provide to its clients varies. Navigating the aviation transport arena can be challenging on a good day and treacherous on a bad one, so contracting with a company that has a

Figure 1. A contingency plan can minimize downtime, ensuring that replacement equipment is shipped quickly.

proven track record for success and excellent service is optimum.

When looking for an aviation management company to provide a rapid response service, there are three critical components to look for: experience, capabilities, and availability.

Experience

When looking for aviation management companies for rapid response purposes, first and foremost, determine if they have ever serviced oil and gas companies. Ask for case studies. Those case studies will shed light on real mis-

sions — the emergencies, what was done to solve the challenges and the outcomes. Be specific when asking questions because, even within the oil and gas industry, there are many different needs and types of logistical emergencies.

Experience is also demonstrated through longevity. How long has your provider been in business and how long have they been providing aviation management support?

They should be able to provide a long list of successfully implemented rapid response operations for their clients whether they be large corporations, government entities or non-profits.

Longevity is also key because it means that an aviation company has built lasting relationships with air carriers. Because of those important relationships, they are able to provide a quicker response. Furthermore, a company with longevity will be knowledgeable about aircraft and know what to ask of the carrier when it comes to pricing and services. (See Figure 3).

By building a large air carrier network, an established provider has better buying power and can receive preferential pricing from cargo providers. It also will have established lines of credit with many suppliers, which allows it to expedite flights for customers.

In looking at a company's experience, ask the company whether it has experience transporting people and cargo over international territory. This is important because it can be very difficult to deal with customs. For example, Canadian customs is very professional and easy to work with. Many of the required, pre-flight forms can be submitted electronically to speed up the process.

But not every country's customs work the same. Each country has its own set of rules and, if there is any issue with compliance, it will cause long delays. Additional issues — temporary import bonds, customs warehousing, and customs brokers — present challenges that can cause a company to lose a lot of money, if it is not careful.

An oil and gas company in crisis-mode doesn't have time for delays. That is why it's so important to get a list of countries that the company has had experience working with.

If you know you'll need to import parts from a particular country and it isn't on the aviation management company's list of customs it has experience with, reconsider. Keep shopping around until you find the right company. Always get the details.

Capabilities

Your aviation management provider must prove that they have the ability to do the job from start to finish. Not every job requires the same type of aircraft. For example, an operation requiring a very large piece of equipment might require a 747, while an operation that requires multiple smaller parts might require a King Air turboprop aircraft, (See Figure 4).

Why does this matter? Cost. The larger the airplane, the more the customer pays. A good aviation management company will understand this and work not only toward completing the mission as rapidly as possible, but completing it at the lowest cost possible.

Don't forget about the need for companies to provide the right kind of aircraft anywhere in the world. Most oil and gas companies operate in many countries. They need to be able to count on their aviation management



Figure 2. Logistical challenges include airport restrictions, over-flight permits, import bonds, customs warehousing, and customs brokers.



Figure 3. Knowledge of aircraft (space and weight limits) and cargo moving services can reduce transport costs.



Figure 4. Each transport requires the appropriate aircraft and very large equipment might need a 747.

company to provide rapid response services regardless of where it occurs.

Furthermore, a good aviation management company should be able to provide comprehensive solutions unique to the situation. They may have to arrange ground transportation, hire security guards, and find storage for its clients — all in the same mission.

Every step is important to ensure that the cargo is transported. Every project should revolve around a strict timeline with open communication between all parties involved: giving feedback and making adjustments as required.

Availability

Another critical factor when choosing an aviation management company is availability. The provider should have no geographical or time restrictions. The company should be international in scope and its representatives must be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Logistical emergencies don't usually occur when it is convenient to deal with them, so your provider should offer solid examples of their around-the-clock capabilities. For example, not all rapid response emergencies revolve around broken equipment. Sometimes, lives could be at stake.

In 2007, four contractors for a global oil and gas company were taken hostage by gunmen off the coast of Nigeria. As soon as it happened, CSI put planes on standby in a neighboring country and was ready to take the hostages home, once they were released. After three weeks, the hostages were released. Because of prior planning, the hostages were transported back to their homes safely and securely.

If your company does not have an aviation management company with a rapid response program in place, now would be a good time to shop around and find a provider that meets your needs. **OE**

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