

## Crew Wi-Fi is a Perfect Fit for Reederei Thomas Schulte

### Globecomm Enables Onboard Access to Mobile Devices

Reederei Thomas Schulte operates in two specialized and highly competitive shipping sectors, trading bulk carriers and containerships worldwide. Like many shipowners the company also faces competition to attract and retain the best officers and crew. The global shortage of high-quality sea staff has been a fact of life for some years and Thomas Schulte takes crew supply and welfare extremely seriously.



Chief Engineer on the *Clara Schulte* is online and connected with crew Wi-Fi.

The company has invested in crew retention, selecting the Globecomm Maritime crew Wi-Fi solution to provide simple, affordable and private email and SMS access across its 40-strong containership fleet.

Globecomm Maritime launched its crew Wi-Fi service in late 2011 to provide a cost-effective and low-maintenance means of delivering data access to crews, who are able use their own laptops and smartphones to keep in touch with home.

Globecomm Maritime had previously provided its conventional crew email service to Thomas Schulte on five ships through a third-party provider. The service was very popular among the

crew for its flexibility and the ability to connect with shore at predictable cost, but the company realized it could offer a better experience.

“Previously if the crew wanted to make a phone call or a send personal email they had to go to the bridge. Not many people wanted to do this, primarily because there was no privacy,” explains Jan Paninka of the company’s technical ship manager Ocean Shipmanagement. “The competition to retain quality crew is critical for ship owners and as more of Gen X and Y go to sea, the competition can only increase. We realized we would need to provide a better level of access for our crews.”

In summer 2011, a trial of the crew Wi-Fi system was held on three Thomas Schulte containerships. Following the success of the trial – during which over 500 messages and voice calls were exchanged per ship per month – Ocean Shipmanagement decided to outfit all its managed container fleet with Wi-Fi.



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Crew calling has seen a boom in demand in recent years but for some owners and operators – as well as for their crew – the reality is not always as good as the promise. For the crew member, the issues of access to equipment, privacy and cost are a barrier. For the master, the administration of crew calling, control and security are still a burden he could do without. For the owner or manager, there is the risk of virus infection or disputes if something goes wrong with the network or PC while crew are using it.

Satellite communications airtime is still an expensive and limited resource and is primarily installed to support ship’s business. This combination of factors led Globecomm Maritime to devise

a new way to bring communications to the crew while lowering the risks for the owner, according to Malcolm McMaster, VP Globecommm Maritime.

“Providing dedicated Wi-Fi onboard ship has huge advantages in terms of access, because the crew can use it on their own smartphones or laptops, which solves the privacy issue. The other significant advantage is that the Wi-Fi can be firewalled completely from the ship’s business network. This removes the danger of virus infection, as well as solving the issue of administration for the bridge and senior officers.”

Crew across the Thomas Schulte container fleet are able to purchase airtime calling cards direct from the supplier, reducing the intervention of the shipping company to a minimum, with administration and billing of crew services kept completely separate from business accounts.



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For Reederei Thomas Schulte, the decision to install crew Wi-Fi service was an easy one to make, according to Mr Paninka.

“The extra additional investment for us was very low because we already have the communication equipment and network onboard. The router and wireless repeaters are the only additional hardware required and these can be installed by the crew. The Wi-Fi network uses the same communication server as the ship’s business, but it is completely separate from the ship’s network. It is also easy to control access and restrict certain sites and services.”

The standard Wi-Fi outfit includes a dedicated PC and several wireless access points and repeaters to carry the signal around the ship. The service includes access to the SMS gateway and prepaid access to emails. Voice communications options depend on the ship’s provision but typically include voice lines and data access via the dedicated PC located in the crew mess.

“Thomas Schulte are in a very competitive market and they want to retain their crew so for them, this is an opportunity to be forward thinking

and to demonstrate that they are a quality operator,” continues Mr McMaster.



“When the first trial was installed I think there was a degree of skepticism among the crew as to whether it would work, but they were happy to give it a try. The next thing we knew, people were crowding round and very soon a whole bunch of people were using it. The reaction was amazing.”

Globecommm Maritime can provide the Wi-Fi solution over any installed or new communications equipment regardless of hardware manufacturer or airtime provider. By March 2012, Globecommm had installed the Wi-Fi service on some 150 ships with another 150 waiting to be installed and more supply contracts under negotiation.

And what does the crew think? Master of the Dorian Schulte Gennadiy Balabanov says the system has brought immediate benefits.

“I enjoy being able to use my own laptop to contact my family and I think the price for the pre-paid cards is reasonable – the crew is very satisfied with it. Younger people use the Internet more than the older generation and onboard Dorian Schulte is no exception.”



45 Oser Avenue  
Hauppauge, NY 11788  
**+1 631-231-9800**  
info@globecommm.com  
www.globecommm.com