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Google inspires ship schedule site

INTTRA's OceanSchedules.com available to members, non-members of Web portal.

BY CHRIS DUPIN

The shipping portal INTTRA unveiled a new Web site, OceanSchedules.com Jan. 29 that will offer shippers, forwarders and others the ability to search 4 million liner services for the best way to move their cargo.

Any liner company — not just members of INTTRA — can post their schedules on the site. And anyone with a computer and Internet browser can access the information.

The service is free to both schedule posters and searchers. That's because the new Web site plans to make money by posting ads, and it wants to have as many users as possible using the Web site in order to attract advertisers.

In a strategy very similar to the one that has made the Internet search engine Google such a success, OceanSchedules.com will allow advertisers to very specifically target users.

For example, if a line wants to promote a new service offering fast transit time from Hong Kong to Rotterdam, it could post ads for that service only when a user looks to see when services between that port pair are sailing. A warehouseman in Amsterdam could ask that his ads pop up when a shipper specifies that port as a destination

from anywhere in the world. Or Tacoma could promote itself as a less-congested alternative when a shipper looks to see when ships to Los Angeles sail.

Indeed, Harry Sangree, managing director of OceanSchedules.com, said the idea for the portal occurred to him as he was reading a book, *The Google Story*, about what made Google so successful.

For a few minutes he found himself wondering what it would be like to work for Google — then he realized that INTTRA members do a lot of searching themselves and that INTTRA could use some of Google's strategies.

Competition. The new Web site is entering a crowded field.

Carriers have online schedules as do the competing portals CargoSmart and GT Nexus.

Magazine publishers such as *American Shipper* and the *Journal of Commerce* group offer online schedule products — though they differ considerably, both with each other and OceanSchedules.com.

American Shipper believes its ComPair Global Schedule Analyzer product to be particularly strong in allowing shippers to quickly determine which shipping lines are

in vessel alliances on various routes.

The *Journal of Commerce's* Global Trade Analyzer boasts about frequent updates to its database, which has more than 500,000 sailings.

And there are still many print publications with schedules including *Pacific Shipper*, *Shipping Digest*, *American Journal of Transportation*, *Canadian Sailings*, *Hong Kong Shipping Gazette*, and *Lloyds Loading List*. There are similar publications in many countries around the world.

Some traffic managers or freight forwarders still prefer to flip through paper rather than use a computer keyboard. Many forwarders and non-vessel-operating common carriers have employees each week create lists of alternative schedules. Indeed, Sangree said OceanSchedules.com has a feature to download schedules into a spreadsheet to assist them in carrying out this time-consuming task.

Some of these publications feature listings from NVOs, but Sangree said OceanSchedules.com will not include NVOs because the huge number of services they offer could swamp the system.

However, Sangree said NVOs and other logistics companies will be able to advertise on the site, and OceanSchedules.com is considering creating a "white label" version of its product that other companies could put on their Web site and paste their own logo onto.

The idea, he explains, would be to drive additional eyeballs to the ads that the OceanSchedules.com posts. Sangree is looking at other sorts of alliances with publications, perhaps hiring them to sell ads for the site.

The company said it will be the most comprehensive schedule site on the Internet. Sangree said at least one carrier that is not a member of INTTRA had agreed to post its schedules on the site, though he

declined to identify it before the site went public.

Adding Up. If 4 million sounds like an awful lot of different voyages for OceanSchedules.com to list, perhaps a quick explanation is in order.

First, it counts each service a carrier offers separately, even if four or five carriers are sharing space on the same ship.

Secondly, each port pair on which a carrier offers a service is counted. For example, if a carrier had a string of ships that sailed in a Halifax/New York/Rotterdam/Felixstowe/Halifax rotation, then it might count 10 services: from Halifax to New York, Rotterdam, and Felixstowe; from New York to Rotterdam and Felixstowe; from Rotterdam to Felixstowe, New York and Halifax; from Felixstowe to Halifax and New York.

But Sangree said OceanSchedules.com would not make up voyages if a carrier doesn't actually offer them to a customer. For example, in the above example, it would not include a theoretical move from New York to Halifax, since a carrier would not move a box back and forth across the Atlantic (nor a shipper endure the delay and cost) to move it up the coast several hundred miles.

Even if non-INTRA members choose not to list their schedules, users of OceanSchedules.com would have a window into many of their sailings from the Web site. That's because at least one member from each of the major alliances — the Grand Alliance, New World Alliance and CKYH alliance — are members of INTTRA. If an INTRA member is chartering space

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GLOBAL, COMPREHENSIVE INTERACTIVE.

Search results for: Singapore, Singapore (SGSIN) to Hong Kong, Hong Kong (HKHKG) 01-18-2007 to 01-25-2007

SCHEDULES MANAGER

52 of 75 schedules shown

DEPARTURE

Date: 01-18-07 to 01-25-2007

Day of the Week: M T W T F S S

TRANSIT TIME

2 Days to 6 Days

ARRIVAL

Date: 01-23-07 to 03-08-2007

Day of the Week: M T W T F S S

CARRIERS

select all | clear

- ALIANÇA
- CMA-OSM
- HAMBURG-SUD
- HAPAG-LLOYD
- K-LINE
- MSC BHD
- MITSUI OSK LINE
- MSC
- NYK LINE
- SENATOR LINES

Carrier	Depart	Day	Transit Time	Arrive	Day	Info/Contact/Book
K LINE	01-18-2007 04:30 am	Thu	4	01-22-2007 02:00 pm	Mon	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
K LINE	01-19-2007 07:50 am	Fri	3	01-22-2007 03:00 pm	Mon	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
HAPAG-LLOYD	01-19-2007	Fri	3	01-22-2007	Mon	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
MITSUI OSK LINE	01-19-2007	Fri	3	01-22-2007	Mon	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
NYK LINE	01-19-2007	Fri	3	01-22-2007	Mon	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
K LINE	01-19-2007 05:00 pm	Fri	4	01-23-2007 08:00 am	Tue	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
HAPAG-LLOYD	01-20-2007	Sat	2	01-23-2007	Tue	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
ALIANÇA	01-20-2007	Sat	3	01-23-2007	Tue	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
CMA-OSM	01-20-2007	Sat	3	01-23-2007	Mon	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
HAMBURG-SUD	01-20-2007	Sat	3	01-23-2007	Tue	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
HAPAG-LLOYD	01-20-2007	Sat	3	01-23-2007	Tue	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
MSC BHD	01-20-2007	Sat	3	01-23-2007	Tue	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
NYK LINE	01-20-2007	Sat	3	01-23-2007	Tue	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
NYK LINE	01-20-2007	Sat	3	01-23-2007	Tue	[Info] [Contact] [Book]
HAPAG-LLOYD	01-20-2007	Sat	6	01-27-2007	Sat	[Info] [Contact] [Book]

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OceanSchedules.com Web site screen shot of search results page.

on a non-INTRA member's ship, that vessel's schedule will still appear on the Web site.

While users of Web sites all have different preferences, Sangree believes that users will find several features of OceanSchedules.com that make it easy to use.

First, it is written using a Web development technique called "Ajax," an acronym for Asynchronous JavaScript and XML. This allows all the data for a query to be downloaded onto the user's computer so that the Web page does not have to be reloaded each time a user edits his query. This could be particularly useful when a user is located where poor broadband

or only dial-up connections are available, he said.

It also makes interacting with the data easy. For example, a shipper or forwarder could make a query for all the carriers offering service from Hong Kong for New York in the next three weeks. A list of 57 possible sailings with transit times of 19 to 41 days might pop up. Then removing check marks from boxes would edit the query to choose only the three carriers the forwarder or shipper has contracts with, reducing the number to 29; then eliminate those services whose vessels sail or arrive on weekends, reducing the number to 21. If he wanted only ships with a transit time of 30 days or less, he can slide a little bar to the right and the number of remaining sailings would be 14. Since the data is stored in the user's computer, the revisions appear instantly.

The site has other features that make it easy to work with, such as user keys in the name of a port, an "auto completion" feature that will identify it after just a few letters have been typed, or suggest the possible alternatives. And if a shipper types Amsterdam as a destination, for example, the program will automatically include sailings for nearby Zeebrugge unless a shipper asks it not be included.

Once a shipper has found a voyage he wants to book cargo on, he can push a button that will take him to the INTTRA site if the carrier is a member of the portal, or to the section of a Web site of a non-INTRA carrier where he can book online. There is also a help button that a shipper can press to get a carrier representative to contact him.