

# Value-added differentiators are key

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THE PHRASE "electronic solutions" has to mean exactly that, not just act as a processing tool for form-filling, according to Jonathan Sims, MD of Core Freight Systems.

He suggested that there was a growing appreciation amongst forwarding and clearing agents that their investment in "electronic solutions" can, and perhaps should, provide much more than simply a mechanism to produce the documentation – or electronic data interchange (EDI) messages – required for customs clearance.

"These users are not necessarily large players, although there obviously are some within this category," Sims added. "They are organisations characterised by management who are conscious of the requirement to continually improve efficiencies in internal work processes, enhance management control and institute improved support structures – all with the objective of delivering better service to their clients."

The end result is that importers and exporters are increasingly demanding of their service providers, and information technology (IT) systems are integral to the delivery of the solutions they require.

"Meeting SA Revenue Service (Sars) requirements is essential," Sims told FTW, "however this is not enough. We have seen

business won on the basis of a demonstrated technological competence and put at risk, or even lost, where this is not available from the agent."

The Core Freight policy about features that the forward thinking agent requires is: Software that is logical and easy for staff to operate; comprehensive management reporting; on-line realtime support and problem resolution; and proven interfaces with other applications.

"Also," said Sims, "they should be looking for the capacity to provide for future potential requirements, such as electronic document storage and retrieval facilities, flexible statistical and financial profitability analysis, and client access to relevant data. This requires an ongoing investment in research and development (R&D) by the IT service provider – involving not only money but, equally importantly, imagination and intellect."

Core Freight's marketplace is a mix of clients varying from large players – with established international networks – to the smaller, entrepreneurial owner-managed businesses. And this, according to Sims, has given the company a vital insight into the real issues faced by the SA operators.

"It is our objective to not only do the basics exceptionally well," he said, "but also to make available the value-added differentiators to clients who see merit in them."