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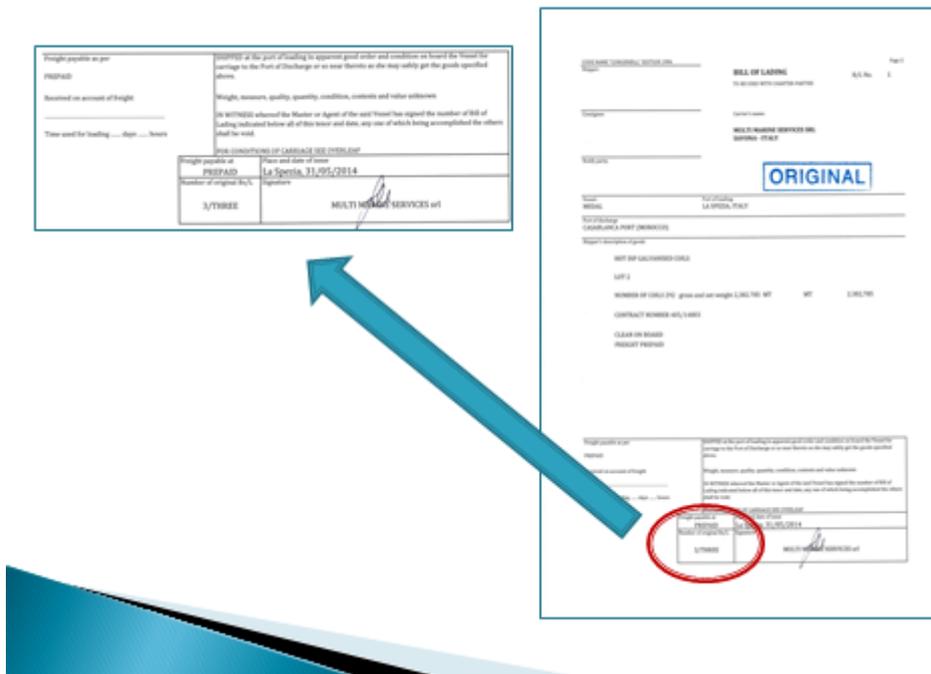


No matter what it looks like it's not a spelling mistake, just the easiest way to express in graphics the reality we have been living under the past few years: we all know what huge steps technology has made in communication and the transmission of data and this has also had a big impact on the shipping world.

We want to look to what E-maritime is, from a port agent point of view, and what prospects we have for the immediate future through the eyes of a young port agent (since 'young' is what they call people my age nowadays, whether you believe it or not).

To begin with we must realize the proportion of "E-nnovation" and its environment: so let's talk about the future by giving a look to the past.

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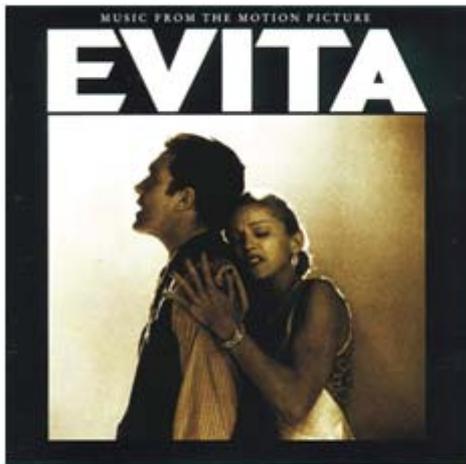


We are all into shipping, so there is no need to explain what a Bill of Lading is: we know what the functions of this extremely important document are, we have seen a lot of them and we are confident with this highlighted section, showing date and place of emission, details of freight payment and number of originals issued. And we all know that the number of originals issued is 3 (three) – you may say that “always” is a word that cannot be used in shipping and you would be right, but I will accept the risk of being inaccurate and state that a ConGenBill is always issued in 3 originals.

Now did you ever wonder why 3 originals are issued? Did you ever ask a shipowner, a ship’s captain, a charterer, a shipper, a receiver or even a bank clerk working with Letters of Credit? The answer is extremely simple and will be the same from all of the above mentioned subjects: “Because that’s the way it has always been done”.

Of course it’s a tradition. Consider the importance of the Bill of Lading (named for the first time in a law code in Florence in 1526) as document of title of the goods transported: with 3 originals one could have been placed on board in the hands of the captain, one handed out to the shipper and another one dispatched in the fastest possible way to the receiver, in order to avoid major issues in case the document was lost.

But what is the result of this tradition in today’s shipping practice? All original bills of lading must be issued in 3 copies (actually originals) and since there are 3 originals the bank of the receiver will ask for all 3 originals to be presented together to negotiate the letter of credit. Dear bank clerk, why do you need 3 originals to be presented to you? If I may quote: “How can one person like me, say, / Alter the time-honored way the game is played?”



“How can a
person like me,
say,
Alter the time-
honored way
the game is
played?”



Charta Partita



Once again, we are all into shipping: I don't need to explain what a Charter Party is. Or do I? Here you can see a Charter Party issued around the end of the 1800. It's a contract, infact, but why do we call it "Charter Party"? And why is "renting" a ship called "chartering"? Where does that verb come from?

It's derived from the Latin words "Charta Partita" / torn page. This dates from the time when an agreement was drawn up on a single sheet of parchment and then torn in two pieces, one portion being kept by each of the two parties. And that's what we call it today, even though we don't tear the paper anymore and of course most of the time a fixture is not even printed on paper but just agreed on a quick email with a short recap of main terms.

Interesting to consider that not only all contracts involving ships are called Charter Party, but also the whole terminology: a Shipowner's **Chartering** department **Charter**s a ship to a **Charterer** by agreeing a standard form of **Charter Party**. Would anyone expect any change at all in the world we have just described by talking about its main instruments (BsL and CPs)? Now that I have lowered your expectations, I will try to surprise you.

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“ ... with change coming slowly, if it comes...”

All above just to say that we are talking of what we called “E-nnovation” in a business which is probably one of the most tied up to time honored tradition and customs.

Quoting J.R.R.Tolkien: “And so life in the Shire goes on, very much as it has this past Age, full of it’s comings and goings, **with change coming slowly, if it comes...**”. And after all we are in shipping and, yes, we are in this Shire, where change comes slowly – as said, if it comes at all!

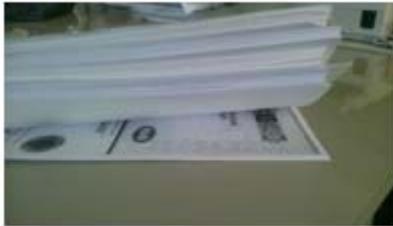
Just recap quickly: innovation, digital revolution, internet, E-maritime – but still today we print, stamp and sign 3 originals of a bill of lading and we say that ships are trading by means of contracts called Chartae Partitae.

Don’t get me wrong: I am not being polemic or complaining about anything. Shipping is the world I was born and raised in, in which I work and that I love and I am sure you get that it’s just a little kind sarcasm making me tease this business as if it was a good old friend of mine.

The point I wanted to make so far (and you may be allowed to ask me why didn’t I state my point without talking for 10 minutes about old papers) is that the usual cruising speed of change in the shipping business is **Dead Slow**. And this outlook will help us appreciate the actual steps forward in E-maritime made over the past few years.

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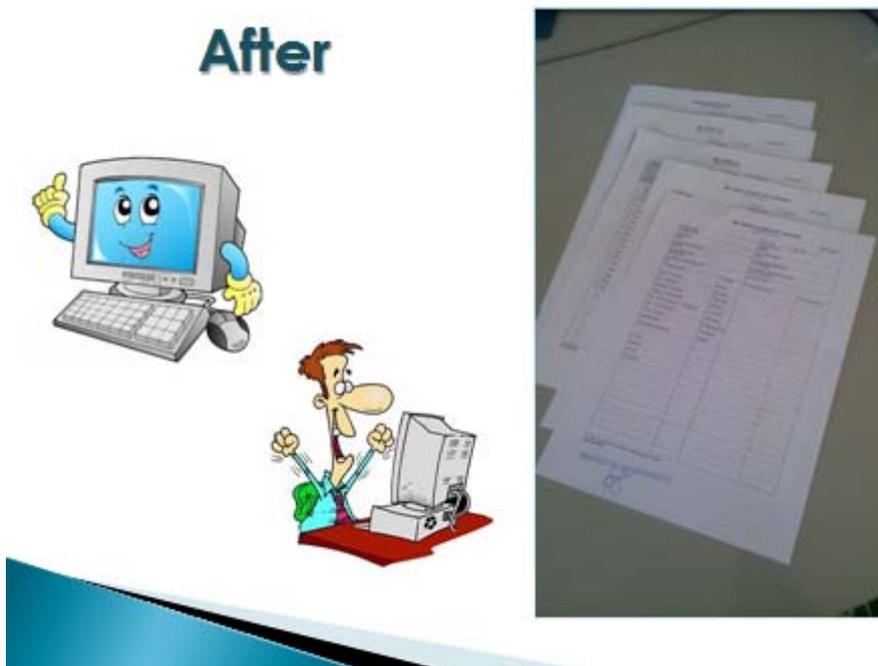
Before



Let's finally come (briefly, I swear) to the real stuff: the advent of modern electronics in the shipping business, as of course in the world as a whole, has been a real revolution. We receive emails from captains of ships sailing in the middle of the Atlantic; we send files as email attachments to ships thousands of miles away from the coast and all this virtually within minutes and directly from our cell-phones. If we think that only 15 to 20 years ago the beating heart, the nerve center of a port agency office was that bulky, noisy machine called "Telex" since it was the only way to communicate with ships the prospect of this volution should make you shiver.

Coming down (again briefly) to the day to day job, I started almost 10 years ago and have been a keen water clerk, boarding the ship on arrival and asking the captain for **this** – i.e. approximately 100 to 150 sheets of paper with various declarations, copies of certificates, a hand-cramping quantity of stamps and signatures: a treasure of paperwork which had to be guarded with my life since each and every sheet of that tome was vital to the relevant authorities and had to be physically handed over to the correct party to obtain the revered brass stamp on the first page called "Free Pratique". And if you did not check each and every page was in perfect order you would have to go back on board, ask the captain to amend the faulty declaration and run back to the Harbour Master hoping that in the meantime the office had not closed for lunch or breakfast or dinner or simply the duty officer was unavailable, in which case the ship would face a delay and you would be – as *Pilipino* crews say – *Pucked*.

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But the world as we are saying has changed. **This** is what a water clerk now has to pick up when he (or she) board the ship on arrival: 2 sheets of paper needed for Customs officers visit and 2 sheets of paper needed for Immigration officers visit. Isn't it nnovation? Not a joke! It's a whole new world. Seriously.

The system all Harbour Master offices are now using in Italy is called PMIS (that "I" being extremely important, for anyone being confident with the idea of facing PMS-ing officers and authorities!!!) and is now an integrated system which allows most of the information to be passed on via a website allowing us to insert all data and upload needed attachments. Clearances and authorizations are printed directly from the website with an electronic signature system both for the agents and for the H.M. officers.

Yes, whether you believe it or not, it is that simple, at least most of the time, or if you wish with most common pratiques. Officers at the Harbour Master check the pratiques on the website, make sure all is in order, part of the pre-checking process is carried out by the program itself since some information has to be inserted and have to be consistent with other data.

So what more do we want or look for?

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Brigadoon

Brigadoon. Clearly if we want more what we want is Brigadoon. I will not stop to explain to those who are too young to have seen the movie / musical what this village is, they are young and confident with technology so they can Google it...

To be honest if we ask for any more improvement we may appear cheeky, but why not? We have already seen how, in less than 10 years, a port agent has somehow been allowed to bother the captain less and less with paperwork, copies and declarations so why not work for something even better? What about a small wishlist?

One matter is extremely important of course and we, as agents, would fully appreciate: reducing bureaucracy does not have to mean in any way reducing control or asking authorities to be permissive on laws and regulations. The point is using the new systems of communication and information to allow everybody's day to day job to be more efficient, without jeopardizing the security of seas and shores.

The prospective we want to see in the future is an evolution of the present systems which could allow the Harbour Master systems to coordinate with the Vessel Tracking Systems we are all using for different purposes, in order to always have reliable and evincible data.

Another idea could be a better use of the Artificial Intelligence we have our hands on: some authorizations are subject to simple calculations of data and acknowledgement of information so men are involved only when something "sounds weird". Nowadays a computer can check the standard variables of a garbage declaration and authorize the ship to keep some residues on board if standard requirements are met – otherwise an officer can check the file himself and evaluate contingencies.

Last wish for the future: more coordination between Italian and European ports – and why not, even non-European ports. Think about all European ports to be connected to the same data exchange system. No point in asking captain to declare the last Paris Memorandum of Understanding inspection since it would have been recorded directly by the coast guard authority!

Are we dreaming? Maybe. But it's a matter of whether you believe or not that a man's dream can change (at least a small part of) the world. If I may close with a quote: "If you were to ask me / after all that we've been through / - Still believe in Magic? / - Yes I do, / - Of course I do!"

**“And if you were to
ask me
After all we’ve
been through:
Still believe in
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Yes I do.
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