



Improving Visibility and Efficiency Delivers Empire Supply Chain Success

ABOUT EMPIRE

For over 30 years, Empire Furniture has been supplying and installing quality office furniture for customers around Australia. The company comprises a retail brand, Empire, and a wholesale brand, Shape.

Clients of the company include high profile corporate entities, government departments, regional and local small to medium enterprise customers and the home office market.

The company started working with AXIMA to handle its freight forwarding and customs requirements from offshore manufacturers to Port of Brisbane in 2009. The commercial relationship has since grown to encompass a broader scope in terms of freight forwarding and additional logistics services.

The biggest plus of this ongoing collaboration for Empire has been the pro-active, honest and open relationship that has underpinned the partnership from the beginning.

THE CHALLENGES

Empire Furniture Operations Manager, Trevor Gerrand, says the company's previous arrangements had seen their needs "lost in the system" compared to larger volume shippers.

"It was difficult to get the right information at the right time," Trevor says.

This made it more challenging to achieve the chief KPI for his department, ensuring stock arrived when it was required to meet the needs and timeframes of end customers. Empire customers include commercial office tenants, fit-out firms and more recently, educational institutions.

When the customer is a builder, fit-out contractor or tenant moving into a new or freshly refurbished office space, timelines are particularly critical, Trevor explains.

AXIMA is the right size to deliver Empire with supply chain success. Trevor and his team receive the operational capacity and buying power from the largest freight forwarders while receiving personalised service and access to top level management. With AXIMA, Empire gets the best of both.

it's easier with
empire
office furniture ESTD 1982

Situation

Growing Australia-based wholesaler and retailer that required improved supply chain visibility and efficiency. Empire was frustrated with their current freight forwarder as they felt like a number to them. They were looking for a full service logistics provider that could support their growth and cared about their supply chain success.

Services Provided

- International freight forwarding
- Customs clearance
- Domestic transport
- Specialised logistics advice
- Various other logistics services

Result

- Increased reliability, responsiveness and visibility for freight forwarding and distribution
- Ongoing cost reductions and efficiencies
- Increased confidence and trust in their outsourced logistics provider
- Reduced risk and improved productivity for the internal Empire team

THE ATTRACTION FACTORS

What drew him to AXIMA as a freight forwarder and Customs broker was their client focused approach and their reliability and responsiveness. The collaborative relationship that has developed with AXIMA's team members and top level management give him confidence and peace of mind.

"The AXIMA team member spent a lot of time with me, understanding our needs and what we were trying to achieve," Trevor says.

"Most freight forwarders have similar systems, and the prices are similar, the biggest points of difference with AXIMA are the high level of trust we have in them and our overall relationship. They really care about our success."



Working with AXIMA means I don't really have to think about the freight forwarding process as they work as an outsourced freight and logistics team for us.



Trevor Gerrand, Operations Manager, Empire



THE PAYOFFS

Trevor says the transition from Empire's previous freight forwarder to AXIMA was "a lot easier" than he expected.

He attributes that to the amount of work AXIMA did in the background to ensure a smooth transition and the care factor they have about Empire's supply chain success.

One of the major benefits he has seen since partnering with AXIMA is the degree of supply chain visibility he now has in terms of where his freight is while in transit.



I have trust and confidence in Karen, her team and everyone at AXIMA. So I'm free to deal with the other side of the process which is getting products out to customers.



Trevor Gerrand, Operations Manager, Empire

"I can see where the ships are, and when they are coming in. That then allows me to have the appropriate information to communicate with my customers."

Having that information on hand is especially helpful when dealing with the added complexity of needing to ensure products arrive when required at building sites. Trevor says a lot of work goes into the planning of logistics for these customers, as the window is quite narrow in terms of the overall construction schedule.

"The biggest challenge is planning delivery of our products with the end customer. Communicating clearly with them, and ensuring they understand the plans and timeframes is vital."

MANAGING GROWTH AND CHANGE

Empire expanded into the education sector in 2016. That brought supply chain complexity by way of increased sales and product volumes, new suppliers and new products into the company's supply chain.

The education sector is also very seasonal, and time-sensitive, Trevor says, as many customers require furniture to be delivered and installed by Empire during school holiday periods to minimise disruption and safety risks.

When that involves the Australian summer school holidays, it also means Empire required extra sea freight space at a time when shipping is tight due to the Christmas trade period.

It is the relationships the AXIMA team in Australia and overseas has cultivated with the shipping lines and Empire's suppliers that made achieving the increased space for their freight forwarding requirements as stress-free and cost-effective as possible.

Another recent challenge for the company was the requirement to ship containers into New Zealand from its suppliers in Asia for the first time. The Manager of AXIMA's Brisbane branch, Karen Dawson, made that process "very simple", Trevor says. AXIMA, along with New Zealand 3PL and freight forwarding company Fliway are both part of the Yang Kee Group which means the one group are working to support customers on both sides of the Tasman.



I really appreciate AXIMA's proactive approach to continuous improvement.



Trevor Gerrand, Operations Manager, Empire

BOTTOM-LINE BENEFITS

Overall, Trevor says that "working with AXIMA means I don't really have to think about the freight forwarding process as they work as an outsourced freight and logistics team for us."

"I have trust and confidence in Karen, her team and everyone at AXIMA," Trevor says. "So I'm free to deal with the other side of the process, which is getting products out to customers."

AXIMA also works pro-actively to find ways to make the company's supply chain more efficient. Regular meetings between Empire and AXIMA provide an opportunity to discuss potential improvements to shipping arrangements.

"Each month, I meet with Empire Furniture and complete a review of our freight forwarding and Customs services and their experiences," Karen says.

As part of the reviews, subjective and objective KPIs are reviewed including costs, transit times, and equipment and supplier performance.

During the meeting, it is also an aim to review forward supply chain plans, Karen explains. This might include discussing where their business is going in the next 6-12 months, new suppliers, and increases or decreases in volumes due to specific projects or seasonal fluctuations. This, in turn, helps inform freight forwarding allocations and future rate negotiations.

"We look at process improvements in terms of both soft and hard costs to assist Empire," Karen adds.

Trevor says he does not have to "look or hunt" for ways to achieve improved supply chain efficiency and bottom-line benefits as they are proactively suggested by AXIMA. "I really appreciate AXIMA's proactive approach to continuous improvement."

Some of the suggestions AXIMA has made have brought costs down considerably.

"We are saving thousands," says Trevor. "The relationship that has developed between AXIMA and Empire makes AXIMA a vital part of our supply chain and a trusted partner."

"AXIMA's people are customer-focused," he says.

"The team that works with us is my favourite thing about AXIMA – they make all the difference. It is a positive, open and honest relationship. You can't underestimate the importance of honesty. People at AXIMA will do their utmost to help me out."



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The AXIMA approach

"We take an interest in each client's business and their supply chain success, not just how many sea freight containers they will move each month or how many kilograms of airfreight they have," Karen says. Volumes may be important to ensure competitive value, but she believes that having a strong client-provider relationship is advantageous to both businesses.

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Trevor Gerrand, Operations Manager, Empire

"Our focus on client relationships enables the correct growth focus and provides opportunities to implement supply chain strategies now and in the future," she explains. "When we talk supply chain strategies we need to focus on budget restraints and measures to increase productivity for both the client and AXIMA."

Karen says the question she likes to ask clients is, "Was it painful or easy?" Then there is the follow-up "How can we make it better?"

"Our client's forecasted requirements, as well as process improvements through value-add, is what allow us to become long-term partners – as our clients grow, we grow. If our clients are successful, AXIMA is successful."

AXIMA's people are customer-focused.

Trevor Gerrand, Operations Manager, Empire

