

# Keeping ahead of a challenging environment

**Interesting times are ahead for the navigation industry. With massive oversupply in some sectors of the market, a push to replace older tonnage with newbuildings and mandatory ECDIS reshaping the bridge environment, the challenge to keep ahead of the game is enormous.**

In response to this, Thomas Gunn is building a reputation for providing individual, tailored solutions for clients – but unlike most bespoke products they actually cost the ship operator less than off-the-shelf products.

“As the shipping industry becomes an increasingly complex and regulated environment, ship operators are looking to choose business partners they can rely upon,” said Thomas Gunn, managing director and founder of Thomas Gunn Navigation Services. “The folios we send out are increasingly aligned with ENC purchases and Voyager solutions. However the market for electronic charts is still immature and sadly, frequently, we find the industry poorly advised.

“To offer the best solution we will sit with a superintendent and look at the plans for their vessel, voyage by voyage. We will then create a unique package of folios and individual ENCs, which reflect the vessel’s route or trading area – bringing an end to vessels holding stocks of expensive - and unnecessary – folios,” Gunn said.

Thomas Gunn claimed to be making the most of the opportunities that the newbuild market offers. “The future is looking bright. We are seeing a lot of business out there and have put some attractive offers out to industry,” said Gunn. “We are currently outfitting around five newbuild vessels a week.”

For newbuildings, Thomas Gunn can provide computerised indices, prepared in geographical or numerical sequence for any new vessels. If a completely new outfit is required, the company can provide its own specialised indices, which includes all the ports capable of handling the size and type of vessel in question. These standard outfits can

be tailored to suit the requirements of a particular ship, or fleet of vessels as necessary and with the digital solutions now available, these are fully incorporated into the service.

## Outfit management

Thomas Gunn currently has 3,500 vessels plus under management contracts, several of which are part of large fleets. When these vessels are in service a complete chart and publication inventory covering both paper and digital aspects is sent to Thomas Gunn, from which it will produce a chart and publication index relevant to the specific vessel. This is entered into a specialised computer database where the dedicated index is created, enabling any out of date items, or items where new editions have been issued, to be identified and notified to the customer before supply.

The system is controlled by the company’s proprietary software, which currently monitors and controls supplies for several thousand ships and office libraries. It has been recently updated and builds upon the experience gained in running the service for many years and recent advances in new technology, the company said.

A major advantage of upgrading the system is improved operational efficiency and the ability to offer web-based access to the data held within the company’s internal database, to the Ship Managers, aiding transparency in the service provided to the Customers.

## Move to ECDIS

While the talk is all about electronic navigation, Gunn has seen growth too in unexpected areas. “It’s been a record year for paper charts,” he said. “With the UKHO publishing 700 new editions of paper charts this year, we have seen a 20% increase in



**Thomas Gunn**

turnover in this area.

“Paper charts are still the norm, but ships are beginning to use technology and go for ENCs, ECDIS and digital solutions, so our customer base has significantly increased in this area. However, these are often still not used as the primary source of information but are used to start the familiarisation process and help get people to use electronic navigation to improve their situational awareness,” Gunn said.

He is concerned about the lack of training, however. “It’s a fairly complete concept change from paper folio coverage to ECDIS and we provide training to our customers to ease the process. As the legal deadlines loom ever closer, chart suppliers will play a fundamental role in assisting shipping companies to get to grips with a new method of navigation, which some seafarers have yet



**Voyager software is installed on a Windows PC.**

to experience. The team at Thomas Gunn is well placed to respond to the specific demands of the market – most have a background in shipping and know the industry well,” he explained.

One issue that the industry as a whole is encountering is that many vessels being delivered now, were ordered in 2006-2007 with just one ECDIS, as part of a manufacturer’s integrated bridge system (IBS). Since then, the owner/manager will have had to consider retrofitting a second ECDIS.

This decision and requirement can impact upon ECDIS training requirements throughout a fleet of vessels, as a navigator will probably move around a fleet and be faced with a different system from that he or she undertook type specific training, on his previous assignment. If an owner/manager has a large diverse fleet, a navigator could be facing six or seven different systems in the course of his employment with that company. “This could incur several thousand dollars in training costs alone,” Gunn warned.

The scale of the problem can be seen by the fact that there are about 35 type approved ECDIS on the market with another 25, or so still to come, mainly

originating in the Asia/Pacific

**Digital chart management**

Of course, the move to ECDIS demands better broadband and email connectivity between the ship and shore to deliver digital chart updates quickly and efficiently. Thomas Gunn’s Voyager chart management system uses these advances to simplify the complex and increasingly regulated bridge environment providing a well- established and strong alternative to supplying paper charts alone. Processes are improving as more and more ships become connected. Voyager now receives information directly from the UKHO to the company’s server and its software in turn converts that paper document into digital data so it can be sent directly to the ship.

“Compare this with the problems of supplying paper charts to a vessel - it is like hitting a moving target,” said Gunn. “The ship may have only a short port berth time window and you have to connect with the agent to get the charts delivered on board the ship. If a vessel has been on a long passage and has not received any navigation data from the chart agent for three to four weeks, then it could be in trouble when it comes to an inspection by port state control.”

Voyager provides a complete bridge solution for the navigator and now offers Regs4ships digital maritime regulations incorporated into its streamed navigational data management system. Tested and approved by the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and UKHO and with approvals from a number of flag states, it gives the mariner a personalised database of publications, charts and the applicable notices to mariners (NTM) within a clear folio system. Weekly updates are provided through email or internet. Data is sent to the service user via weekly updates and an emphasis on reducing file sizes is key as file compression is used and only files of relevance to the vessel’s chart outfit are supplied. Nearly 2,000 vessels are currently subscribed to the Voyager service worldwide.

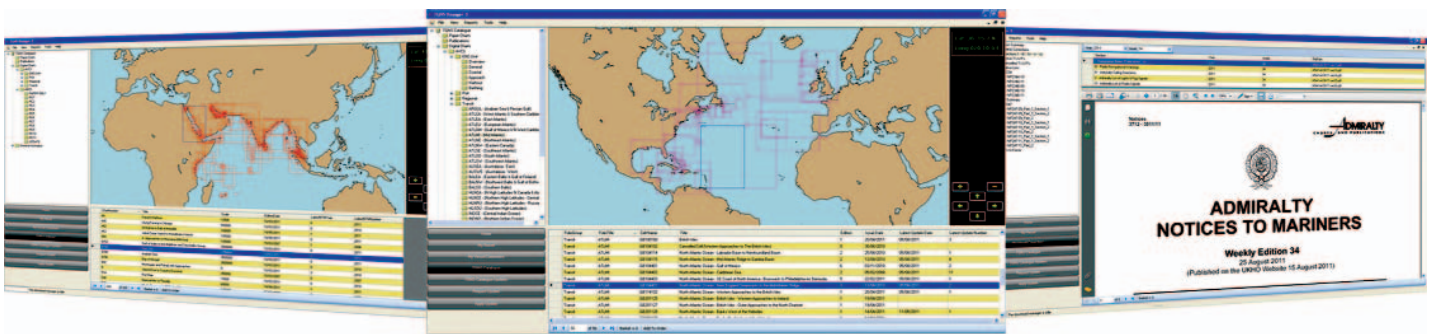
**Worldwide approach**

Thomas Gunn claimed to have gone a long way in spreading the message across the globe by providing expertise and information to the industry on a face to face basis. The process of setting up a new Singapore office has begun and this has provided it with access to completely new markets in China, South Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia. A newbuilding in China or South Korea can be outfitted from Aberdeen in about four days using airfreight, the company claimed.

However, the company said that it wasn’t complacent – competition is strong in this area and it’s important to stay ahead of the game. With investments in IT development, training and creation of a solutions based approach Thomas Gunn said that it understood what vessel Masters are looking for, what the shipmanager is looking for and what potential areas need to be explored.

“Vessels are still coming out of shipyards and the race is on to scrap old tonnage and replace with new,” said Gunn. “The market is changing rapidly and with the mandation period ongoing it’s an exciting time. We have the people and we have the products but ultimately we know that our strength lies in the value of the service can offer during these interesting times,” he concluded.

**TO**



**Weekly Admiralty Notices to Mariners contains a list of new editions of charts and hydrographic books.**