

# The Last Word...

lastword@lloydslist.com

## Succeeding by stealth

A TRULY 'stealth' shipping conference came off successfully in Miami last week, as the Association of Ship Brokers and Agents USA saw 165 delegates arrive from the US as well as overseas for the eighth edition of its annual cargo conference.

There are no bells and whistles about this event. The speeches-and-slideshows part of the proceedings last barely a day-and-a-half and there is no "Person of the Year", no funny hats, no gala dinner — nor any high-profile chief executives or chairpersons with their retinue of hangers-on.

Instead, there are scores of chartering types, ordinary brokers, and an equal proportion of cargo interests and owners — although of the type who would generally rather avoid the spotlight.

This always has worked just fine for Lloyd's List, as these contacts are precisely the types we mine durably for 'proper' news, even if it may not always materialise on the spot. As one attendee put it: "We are the guys who do the work, not the ones who give the speeches."

We wish there were a way to illustrate in print the gesture he made with his fingers as he got to the "speech" part, which excellently imitated a parrot.

## Not too big, not too small

TOM Roberts, Asba president and partner at sale and purchase brokerage and consultancy firm Compass Maritime Services, said the conference serves as the de facto annual get-together of the US Shipowners' Association, which in reality does not exist.

"Cargo is cash, cargo is king — and this is the only event that exclusively is dedicated to cargo," said Roberts. "This is the only event in America where owners, charterers, agents and brokers get to meet each other, both to do business and to network for future opportunities."

Asba's target audience clearly has embraced this message, because this year's delegate count of 165 comfortably surpassed last year's 150, which, in turn, was comfortably bigger than the 2008 audience.

Roberts admitted that fewer tanker companies sent representatives this year as the



Roberts: Asba is the only event that is exclusively dedicated to cargo.

sector tightens its belts, but it would appear that the recession has had no significant effect on Asba's attendance.

Still, Roberts said: "Our aim is to be 'not too small, but not too big'. After a point, we would have to adjust to what this means."

## Classic mistakes

THOMAS Miller account executive Robert Sniffen, a visiting speaker from the UK, had no trouble getting into the spirit of this event.

Ostensibly devoted to "systemic claims exposures" — in other words, liability when a broker or agent screws things up — Sniffen's presentation was chock-full of real life anecdotes that brought home human fallibility in shipping, without crossing any lines of decorum or disrespect.

For instance, there was the guy who fixed a ship to do business in Odessa. The ship had requisite authorisations to do business in Russia but not in Ukraine, and this guy genuinely thought Odessa was in Russia.

Or how about the situation in which frozen cargo was shipped at +18°C instead of -18°C, or wine was shipped at -4°C instead of +4°C?

"When they opened the container in that case, all that fell out was broken glass shards and frozen wine," Sniffen said.

Needless to say, Thomas Miller stands ready to sell you proper cover for any such blunders, or worse, your employees might contrive to commit. ■