

The Role of AI in Freight Forwarding

Key Takeaways

- What has worked so far for others and for myself vs. what has ended in failure.
- A capable in-house AI cost is minimal and the advantage huge. Where are you in the sea of technology as it pertains to your business or industry?
- You give it your data and tell it what you're looking for and see some results you can build on. Create at will!
- Small companies can now move faster than companies with big checkbooks. The game has completely changed. Have you?

"AI in Freight Forwarding is a game changer. The software is now free. The bottleneck is you."

— John Stinson, Co-owner, Texas Global Services • 36 Years in IT

What Has Ended in Failure

- **AI-led "Digital" freight platforms.** They turn themselves into low-margin houses competing only on price. A human almost always has to step in and this model has been proven awful. The thieves exploited this system by impersonating carriers to steal loads.
- **Instant online quotes for complex freight.** Breakbulk, oversized, hazmat and project cargo can't be priced by an algorithm. The quote is wrong, and the forwarder eats the difference. It took our awesome forwarder, Ms. Leslie Danaher, over one month to quote a big AC move with 53 trucks and she got the job.
- **Chatbots as customer service.** A customer with cargo stuck in customs wants a person, not a bot. It costs you at the worst moment. These are great for directing new clients to sign up and not mission critical anything.
- **AI-chosen HS codes without review.** When the code is wrong, CBP or Customs penalties land on the importer, and the forwarder loses the customer. Lorenzo is great at this but 2 errors out of a thousand can cost you every bit of profit from the 998. Check it is my advice.
- **"Uber for trucks."** Venture-funded digital brokers promised to automate trucking. Convoy, the best-funded of them, shut down in 2023.
- **Blockchain shipping platforms.** Maersk and IBM's TradeLens was supposed to digitize global shipping documents. It shut down in 2023 because carriers and forwarders wouldn't share data on a competitor's platform. Who would in a competitive market? Horrible idea, forwarders don't even want reviews on Google from their customers.
- **Replacing experienced people with software.** Carrier, agent and customs relationships do not transfer to a system, and that's where problems actually get solved. The relationships we have built are what make us more or less successful in moving freight due to that phone call.
- **Mass AI-generated web content.** Google filters it out, and customers can tell it wasn't written by someone who moves freight. Every idea and word the AI gives you must be customized to your business.

What Has Worked So Far for Others

Here are the real wins and they share one thing: AI took over one narrow space and people kept the judgment calls.

- **Navia Freight, using Raft.** Raft's CEO says the forwarder saw large efficiency gains after adopting Raft's AI for invoice automation. He's also candid that complex situations needing human judgment, like disputes and exception handling, still don't lend themselves to full automation.
- **CargoAi, air cargo booking.** The Singapore-based platform said shipments through its system rose 64 percent year over year in the first half of 2026, with large global forwarders replacing legacy rate management systems with its procurement platform.
- **Cen Global, customs and back office.** Early adopters reported faster processing, better data accuracy and less manual intervention on customs documentation, shipment tracking and administrative work.
- **Document data entry, industry-wide.** AI that reads bills of lading, commercial invoices, packing lists and customs declarations is credited with cutting manual entry by 80 to 90 percent. One software vendor reports quote reply times dropping from 8 hours to 30 minutes when quote responses are automated. Both figures come from vendors, so treat them as best-case.
- **Automated ports.** This is more automation than AI, but it's the biggest proof that software can run freight operations. PSA Singapore has handled 10 million TEUs at Tuas Port, one of the world's largest fully automated container terminals. In Rotterdam, much of the container loading and stacking is done by autonomous cranes and computer-controlled vehicles.

In an industry survey, 90% of respondents ranked trusted relationships as their top success driver, rising to 97% among small forwarders, while 48% named lack of internal AI expertise as the biggest barrier to adopting it.

What Has Worked for Me and Texas Global Services

Lorenzo success – For my own IT work here at Texas Global Services, I chose an in-house Meta Llama named Lorenzo on a Dell Precision Workstation with an RTX 3060 12GB, both used from Amazon for under \$1000. What I did with it was the most productive year of my professional life. My forwarders are still afraid of the AI. They are not technical. I am now bringing the advancements to them. Lorenzo the Llama is searching for certain email requests styled a certain way right now so he can reply with the correct document, information or file. Asking someone to learn something new is not an advancement. That is a disruption to your business. Sending exactly what they need when they need it is bringing the advancements to them. That is the key.

- **File Number Lookup.** Type or say any information from such as, BOL, Amount of Invoice, Date Paid, Carrier, any information at all and Lorenzo will find it in all 34 fields of his master table and present to you a file number and see the shipment, the QuickBooks charges, dates, paid or not and every email that makes reference to this shipment all together. (The master table is the jewel)
- **Sales Reports.** Summaries that took an afternoon now take minutes and the reps appreciate solid data concerning their pay and performance. I am certain this is a good thing even though it seems small. A collection of good things is a platform that attracts other forwarders that make you a lot of money.
- **Job costing.** This is huge! The software companies want \$2,000 per seat and they do not adjust to your needs. Even Quickbooks wants \$90 per month for this service. Matching vendor bills and customer payments to each file number is already done in the master table. Creating this report took me less than one hour and now I can produce it for whatever dates and forwarders or customers I would like.
- **Keeping data in-house.** Running the model on our own machine means customer data never leaves the office. If you have a tariff calculator, you really shouldn't leave your client's data on the Large Language Model (LLM) such as Copilot, ChatGPT, Claude. You must protect their data as if it were your own. Utilizing in house Small Language Model (SLM) such as the Meta Llama to host the data. You can use the processing power of the LLM to augment without losing confidentiality.

- **Building custom tools.** Using AI to write the software let me build what we needed. This is the huge win. It basically means all software is free and you are the bottleneck. What can you imagine? Because you can create it with AI and make it real.
- **Document Creation.** AI can create documents quickly that you can save time with. There are many applications as I have used them for New Customer Forms on my website that send us customer data in PDF format to the forwarders. Getting an email moments after a customer has filled out a form or a vendor has requested one is a huge win.

By John Stinson – Thanks and Enjoy Crushing It!

These are the forwarders that I serve. I'm proud to provide a platform they are comfortable with and make money to provide for their families. It is my privilege and I am truly grateful. AI has been extremely helpful to me and the industry will leave behind those who have not taken advantage of this. Their cost of doing business will be higher and so will your quote.

Diana Stinson

President, Texas Global Services

Diana has been a Houston Freight Forwarder arranging international freight through the Port of Houston for over 22 years. Texas Global Services is an FMC-licensed Ocean Transportation Intermediary serving manufacturers, oilfield companies, and importers and exporters across the Gulf Coast region as well as globally. Family-owned and operated since founded by Diana Stinson in 2016 as a Woman Owned Small Business (WOSB).

Leslie Danaher

Global Shipping Specialist, Texas Global Services

Based in Houston, TX, Leslie brings a robust skill set spanning supply chain management, project management, logistics services, and contracts and procurement. Drawing on experience from previous roles in the industry, Leslie has become an integral part of the Texas Global Services team and a premier freight forwarder in her own right.

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