

Digital Ship Management Part 7: Synergy

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In the seventh of our interviews with ship management firms on their digital transition, **Samantha Fisk** talks to Synergy Group CEO Captain Rajesh Unni.

Companies are taking different approaches to how they adopt new digital technologies to keep up with demands in the market both regulatory and environmentally. Some are more reactionary to the technology, whereas, some, such as Synergy Group, say they are using them to spearhead future developments, Captain Rajesh Unni, CEO, Synergy Group openly admits that he has always had an interest in new technology that comes on to the market and how it can enhance how businesses can operate.

“I get asked a lot about where next for digitalisation and how we might future proof the vessels we manage and our own systems. And when I’m asked, I’m always minded of the theory of accelerating returns”, Unni remarks, “This, in short form, contends that the pace of technological progress speeds up exponentially over time. I think we’ve seen that everywhere in the last decade.”

Synergy Group has 13 offices in six key maritime centres and over 270 vessels under management, ranging from LPG tankers through to bulk carriers and is ranked in the top 10 ship management companies. For Captain Unni, keeping an eye of future development is a key priority especially when looking to adopting new solutions, but as we have seen with the current market, predicting what will happen next isn’t always easy.

“When I think about the future of shipping and digitalisation, we can see some of the future developments on the horizon, but not all of them. It’s more about mapping the knowns and unknowns and anticipating what opportunities and challenges they might create because digitalisation is constantly changing the shipping landscape”, he says. He goes further to say that in the future shipping will need to be more sustainable and cut its emissions, which the shipping industry can achieve through planning and creating digital solutions to help achieve this, like fuel optimisation systems. But he also adds that the future is still an unknown as shipping and technology can change quickly.

Preparing and working around those unknowns is one of the challenges on the market for most at the moment, Captain Unni’s response is that: “As a ship manager the important thing is to be agile and flexible enough to cope with changes to the technological, regulatory, environmental and political landscapes in which we operate so that our clients can thrive.” Synergy’s strategy for digitalisation has seen it substantially invest in solutions in order to bring better service to its customers. “We made a multi-million-dollar investment to prepare for these changes when we established Alpha Ori Technologies in 2017”, Captain Unni says.

The company took a holistic approach to the investment and looked outside the industry for the solution it finally opted for. “When we set up Alpha Ori up, we took the view that the Internet of Things (IoT), Machine Learning and Cloud-based Big Data science are revolutionising shipping and ship management processes.

We could see they could enhance yield efficiency and transparency for owners, ship suppliers and operators”, Captain Unni comments. Alpha Ori Technologies is a B2B Technology company headquartered in Singapore with overseas product development offices in India and California’s ‘Silicon Valley.’

Synergy Group invested in its SMARTShip solution. Alpha Ori’s ‘Centre of Innovation’ is located in Singapore from where a Network Operating Centre remotely monitors and controls digitally enabled ships. He says that essentially the vessel is viewed as a digital enterprise.

Using SMARTShip Synergy and connect all the digital assets onboard to collect data from. “we can plug this ship into a digital cloud that connects to many other ships, and create the system, tools and business processes that are needed to activate remote monitoring and control of these digitally connected ships, while using collected data as a strategic weapon to drive economic value”, adds Captain Unni.

The industry has heard a lot about big data, but captain Unni believes that there is real value to the data that can be ‘leveraged’ for customers. “Features such as the optimization of total fuel consumption and the creation of intelligent alerts and leading indicators are also integral elements which as shipping becomes more sustainable with IMO 2020 and heads towards a carbon-free future are elements of ship management which we expect to become increasingly important”, he says.

Adopting new technologies has had an impact on how synergy works with it customers, with conversations now changing to fuel optimisation and cyber security.

Captain Unni comments that: “I think also when we deal with clients and we’re talking about digitalisation, cyber security often comes up as a concern. The International Maritime Organization has, quite rightly, issued guidelines to ensure everyone in the maritime sector takes cybersecurity seriously. This includes addressing cyber risks in safety management systems by the start of next year.”

What he adds is that for a company to be successful that it needs to show that has the right solution that adheres to the right standards. Meeting with the standards and the regulations will give customers more confidence to invest in the company and also your solutions.