



When the internet was new to all of us: Panalpina's website from the 90s (Screenshot by Panalpina)

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The times they are a changin'

A 1998 Panalpina video boasting about the company's website as well as Apple's recent mind-boggling market capitalization inspired CEO Stefan Karlen to write a blog post on how important it is for Panalpina, and the freight forwarding and logistics industry as a whole, to change the way we do business. Customers should always be front of mind 24/7/365 and have an easy and seamless experience.

In the last few weeks a couple of things have happened that illustrate why our industry needs to change. The first thing was watching a Panalpina video in the office. Made in the 90s, I'm sure for the time it had the highest production values – but how dated it looks to us now. The fashions and size of the technology we were using then really made us laugh as did the shot

of the panalpina.com website from 20 years ago.

The second thing was Apple becoming the first company in history to break the \$1trillion mark for market capitalization, evidence that technology and the web have moved from being something unusual to something integral in our lives.

Apple used to have an ad campaign revolving around the tag line “It just works.” It was one that other tech companies could have also used; Google, Amazon or Netflix all want to give people an easy, seamless experience without any wrinkles.

Allow me to give you an example. Last week, Bob Dylan came up in conversation and I couldn’t remember the name of one of his albums. Had we been in the 90s, I might have had to wait until the end of the working day to find the name of the forgotten album, at which point I might have gone to a local record shop to have a memory-jogging flick through Dylan’s albums.

But not today.

Like you probably do a dozen times throughout the day, I reached for my iPhone (of course!) and, in a matter of seconds, Google not only gave me the name of the album but also a one-click option to listen to tracks or to download it. Easy, fast, seamless.

But Google is not alone. Think of any of the big, disruptive tech companies – Expedia, AirBnB, Spotify, Uber – and they all do the same thing: give their customers what they want, easily and seamlessly. They make it easy: *it just works*.

Does the freight forwarding and logistics industry offer the same ease of experience to our customers?

Some might argue that as a B2B industry we deal with companies and organizations, not people. But what are companies made up of? People. And these people, just like you and me, live in a real world that is very digital.

Like me and my Dylan-forgetting moment, they are used to jumping online for everything – as we all are – and they are used to having an easy, seamless experience when they do. Do we think that when they get to their workplace and need to ship something that they forget this? Today, they want to be able to go online and search “how to ship something” and have an easy and seamless shipping experience. But the reality of our industry is that our business model today most of the time involves a salesperson calling a customer or cold-calling a potential customer.

Yes we are B2B, but we also need to be B2me.

In today’s world nobody is passively waiting for someone to contact us to

make a sale. As consumers, as private individuals, we don't wait. We get online. Panalpina's customers and potential customers do too, and we have to build solutions that allow them to operate in the same way they would when shopping digitally for a new pair of shoes.

We have to focus on each individual's needs, from the logistics manager in a warehouse, through the supply chain director at a multinational, to the start-up founder who is looking to make their first shipment. They are not 'target accounts'; they are individual people with differing needs, and we should be aiming to meet those needs easily and seamlessly, whatever their situation.

Since we were talking about Apple, it is worth remembering that Steve Jobs and his team of disruptors weren't the first company with a touchscreen mobile phone. Nor were they the first to have maps and apps on their phones. Another company had all of this – as well as the foresight to predict that camera-phones would displace traditional cameras – but that company was concerned about alienating its existing users and so stepped back, allowing Apple to fill that void. Hindsight, and \$1trillion, suggest it was a smart move by Apple.

In a future post, I will outline all the things Panalpina is doing, and the tools we are developing at Panalpina to bridge this digital gap, but for now I want to tell you what we are telling Panalpina staff: that **customers and the customer experience are at the front of our minds 24/7/365**.

We are developing tools that will mirror the ease-of-use of those big tech companies, and ones that aim to delight and deliver, regardless of device. But I also hope these tools will be somewhat invisible. Our customers don't need to know how long we have been developing these tools for. They don't need to know which programming language sits at the back end. They just need these tools to be easy and seamless to use; that they just work.

It is something our entire industry should be doing. After all, as Dylan said: *"Don't stand in the doorway / Don't block up the hall / For he that gets hurt / Will be he who has stalled."* And if you're not sure if I got those lyrics right, you could always go and google it.

Stefan Karlen, President and CEO



[Watch video on YouTube here](#)

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