

New e-commerce business in Asia poised for tremendous growth: Innovation and branding are two keys to its success

亞洲電子商貿高速增長 創意及品牌 成功兩大關鍵



George Wojciechowski, Co-Founder of ShipBob highlights Hong Kong as a hub for the global economy, trade and logistics. He expects many more innovation coming out of here in terms of shipping logistics and global trade.

ShipBob聯合創辦人George Wojciechowski指出香港作為全球經濟、貿易及物流中心，前景樂觀。尤其在船運物流和全球貿易上，預計還有不少創意概念出現。

Online shopping is becoming more and more popular. These days a wide spectrum of consumers are taking advantage of the convenience of ordering everything online and having it delivered right to their doorsteps. Launched in 2014, ShipBob, a Chicago-based tech-enabled fulfilment service company enjoying high sales growth, expects consumers to be drawn in by the inspiring stories of small businesses, and the ability to shop in a huge marketplace where innovation and customisation are two of the key selling points.

Shortcuts to starting a business online

"Global e-commerce business has been growing fast, at a rate of 14% increase in sales annually, and this rate of growth is expected to continue for the next five years. Multimillion-dollar firms such as Nike have e-commerce," says George Wojciechowski, co-founder of ShipBob. "It's getting easier for people to start businesses online. They can start a business in a week, creating new products and bringing in innovative ideas."

ShipBob is one of the innovative start-ups in the industry, posting a sales growth of over 200% year-to-year since 2014. "We are actually one of the first to start building fulfilment centres and software for the next generation of e-commerce merchants," he stresses.

ShipBob has been serving small businesses since it was founded. "One of the things we are most proud of is the fact that the clients from 2014 and 2015 are still using our services. They grew from shipping twenty products a week at that time to handling a

thousand orders a day from all over the world nowadays."

To date, ShipBob has about 3,000 active merchants from 28 countries, with over 90% from North America and the rest from Europe and Asia. "Back in 2014, at one end, the bigger players had been there for ten to twenty years, but not many of them cared much about SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises). On the other, the SMEs had not yet had enough time, and did not have enough resources to prove they could grow."

Wojciechowski adds, "We build a platform that connects with most shopping carts in North America including Shopify, BigCommerce, WooCommerce, Amazon and Ebay. Our platform acts as a control point in the shipping technology logistics part of the e-commerce business. This starts with the most valuable part of the e-commerce business, and we take it one step further."

Excelling in personal service

Wojciechowski sees ShipBob as operating on two fronts—it excels in a vertically integrated solution which they have both the software programme (called Y Combinator), and the physical fulfilment centres. "We integrate with all major e-commerce platforms and marketplaces, which allows us to import orders and send data back and forth in a two-way flow of information. Additionally, we operate our own fulfilment centres. After receiving orders through our customers' e-commerce websites, we pick products out of stored inventories, package them, and ship them to purchasers."

Currently, ShipBob has five fulfilment centres in the United States, allowing customers to store their inventories in any of their fulfilment centres. "An e-commerce merchant selling a handbag in Manhattan needs to ship from New York to all over the world," Wojciechowski explains. "ShipBob merchants can hand their inventories to one of our fulfilment centres, and the majority of their shipment will be delivered within one to two days, at a much lower price comparatively. This is the key for retaining customers," he says.

Personal service is another key element. "Our operating costs are higher because we own our physical fulfilment centres, but we attract a lot of e-commerce merchants because of our vertically integrated solution." Wojciechowski calls it a turnkey: "Many software companies do not have fulfilment centres, whereas our physical centres allow us to integrate everything, and you can deal with dedicated personnel at all times. Once you sign up to store your inventory, you don't have much to do. It's very easy and you don't have to engage with logistic partners in order to ship out."

“What has made us stand apart is that we constantly engage with e-commerce merchants, get their feedback, and find out what tools would be helpful for them. Since we hire our own in-house engineers, we are able to build our own solutions,” he says.

Mind the big data

Wojciechowski pinpoints the need to meet consumer expectations to drive success in e-commerce. “E-commerce merchants need to be able to take into account all the data collected about consumer activity as well as logistics from the shippers’ side. Above all, the analytical tools in our software allow our merchants to follow the data, and find out more about their businesses.”

In addition to correct and timely delivery, branding, particularly of the shopping experience, is increasingly important these days. “There are certain types of branding that merchants try to represent through the customers’ unboxing experience, such as special offers, packaging and marketing materials,” he highlights, adding that consumers are increasingly appealed through branding, and merchants are gaining recognition from the brands with which they are identified.

Wojciechowski will be attending the Asian Logistics and Maritime Conference (ALMC) organised by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council from 19-20 November for the first time, largely because of the tremendous growth opportunities in Asia.

“I am very excited. Hong Kong is super vibrant, and a super location on the global scene. The global business community is looking forward to bringing the best minds, businesses, and thoughts from all around the world into Asia. In addition, Hong Kong is a place that is full of history and innovation. It’s the perfect place to hold this conference, not only for Asia—but for people from around the world to gather, to engage with new and innovative ideas.”

In the global spotlight

He agrees that Asia has been one of the innovators in global logistics in recent times. “While the e-commerce business is newer to Asia than it is to other parts of the world, there are lots of start-ups with very interesting ideas. We’ve learned that there is an abundance of innovation. Corporations are hungry for new ideas. We expect great ideas to come out of Asia.”

Wojciechowski notes that Belt and Road remains one of the hot topics at the Conference. “Business people are fascinated to find out how it’s going to work, and what the potential may be. Additionally, the emerging trends seen in e-commerce could be another highlight, as Asia’s logistics companies move to the forefront in terms of coming up with new ideas, by sharing notes about what businesses are doing.”

He highlights the essential role Hong Kong plays in e-commerce businesses. “While e-commerce booms all over the world, Hong

Kong’s prospects are phenomenal, as the city is always a hub for the global economy, global trade and global logistics,” he says. “There is still so much innovation coming out of Hong Kong in terms of shipping logistics and global trade.”

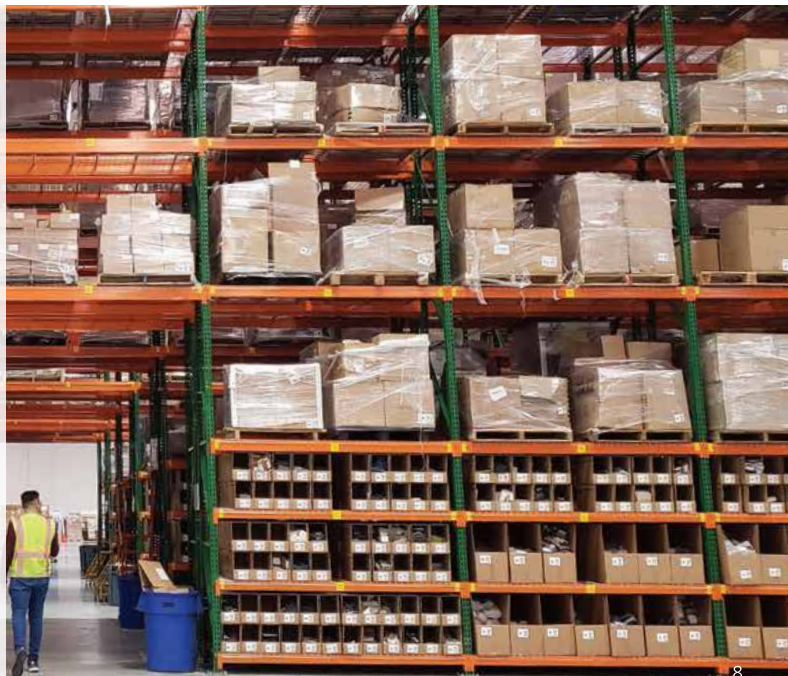
Taking into account of recent events in the city, Wojciechowski concludes on a positive note: “The natural underlying fundamentals that made Hong Kong a vibrant business centre are not going to change. It’s still a wonderful platform to do business, and it will retain its leading role on the global scene.”

網上購物愈趨普及，不同年齡層的消費者愈來愈享受在網上選購各樣商品，及便利的送貨服務。於2014年在美國芝加哥創立的ShipBob，是一家業務高速增長的物流配送服務科創企業 (tech-enabled fulfilment service company)。它預期未來會有更多小型網店在電子商貿平台落戶，以創意及個人化服務吸引消費者。

網上創業 輕而易舉

ShipBob聯合創辦人George Wojciechowski引述數據指，全球電子商貿業務正在快速發展，達至年均銷售增長約14%，並預計未來5年將持續上升；與此同時，不少巨企如Nike亦已提供網上購物平台。「網上創業愈來愈容易，甚至短至1星期，亦能引進更多新產品及創新意念。」

ShipBob是物流業中的一家科創公司，自2014年創立以來，每年銷售增長率皆超過2倍。Wojciechowski強調，該公司是其中一家最早為新一代網店同時提供軟件平台及物流配送中心的科創企業。





「我們亦經常與客戶保持溝通，了解他們的需要，並找出可以幫到他們的軟件工具。由於我們擁有自家的工程師團隊，我們亦可度身訂製所需的解決方案。」他說。

分析大數據

Wojciechowski強調，電子商貿業務要成功，必須達到消費者的期望。「電貿商需要深入了解所蒐集的數據，包括消費者的消費模式，以至付運的物流信息等。我們就會提供數據分析軟件，讓客戶跟貼數據分析，從而發掘更多生意機會。」

他又指，除了正確及準時付運外，電貿商的品牌，尤其所創造的購物體驗，亦愈來愈重要。「在整個開箱的體驗，包括包裝、特別優惠及市場推廣資訊等，都是建立品牌的重點。而消費者認識該品牌，電貿商則會獲得認同感。」

全球焦點

在今年11月19及20日，Wojciechowski將首次出席香港貿易發展局舉辦的「亞洲物流及航運會議」(ALMC)，並坦言是看準亞洲在電子商貿的龐大增長潛力。「我對會議充滿期待。香港非常有動力，在國際上亦佔策略性的位置。全球業界都期望會議帶來新思維、新生意。再說，香港是一個寫有歷史又富有創意的大都會，是舉行這個國際性會議的最理想地點。這不只是為亞洲，而是讓全球業者聚首一堂，交流創新及創意概念的機會。」

他亦認同亞洲在全球物流業是創新的先驅。「雖然相對其他地區，亞洲在電子商貿的發展起步較遲，但區內不少科創都擁有一些有趣又具創意的概念；企業都對新概念趨之若鶩，我們也期望可以在亞洲找到新思維。」

Wojciechowski預期「一帶一路」商機仍是會議的焦點之一。「商界熱衷於知道其發展及潛力。此外，電子商貿的趨勢相信是另一焦點。尤其亞洲物流企業帶來不少新思維，都令業者期待。」他並認同香港在電子商貿扮演重要角色：「電子商貿業務在全球發展蓬勃，香港作為全球經濟、貿易及物流中心，前景樂觀，尤其在船運物流和全球貿易上，預計還有不少創新意念出現。」

就近月香港發生的事件，Wojciechowski個人對香港的營商環境仍感樂觀：「過去令香港成為富有動力的商業中心的那些基礎因數，在未來是不會改變的。香港仍是一個營商的理想平台，並在全球繼續擁有領先的優勢。」

ShipBob自成立起一直以小型公司為服務對象。「令我們最感驕傲的事，是2014、2015年的客戶至今仍在使用我們的服務，並由當年每星期只處理約20個訂單，增加至現時每天處理數以千計，來自世界各地的訂單。」

時至今日，該公司已有3,000個來自28個國家及地區的活躍客戶，其中超過9成來自北美，其餘來自歐洲及亞洲等地。「其實在2014年，有不少大型電子商貿平台已成立10至20年，但當中甚少會關注中小型網店的需要。與此同時，中小型網店亦缺乏時間和資源去證明其業務的增長潛力。」

Wojciechowski續指：「我們建構的平台連接北美大部分的電子商貿平台包括Shopify、BigCommerce、WooCommerce、Amazon、Ebay等，它就如電子商貿中航運科技物流的中心點。這是電子商貿最有價值的部分，而我們再行多一步。」

個人化服務

Wojciechowski形容ShipBob提供垂直一站式方案——其營運分有兩端，一是軟件平台Y Combinator，二是實體的物流配送中心。「我們把主要的電子商貿平台連結起來，方便輸入訂單，然後收集和傳遞數據。此外，我們自家營運的物流配送中心，從客戶網站接收訂單後，會在倉儲取出商品、包裝，再運送給消費者。」

目前，ShipBob在美國設有5個物流配送中心，而客戶可按需要在任何一個中心把貨物寄存。「舉例說，在曼克頓的手袋賣家需要由紐約把貨品寄到世界各地，但ShipBob的客戶就可以把貨物寄存到我們其中一個配送中心。然後，在接獲訂單後的一兩天內，中心便會發貨，而運費亦相對較低，這些都是保留客戶的關鍵。」

個人化服務也是另一個重要元素。「雖然自營物流配送中心的成本會較高，但亦因為我們提供垂直一站式方案，才吸引到更多的客戶。」Wojciechowski解釋：「不少軟件公司都沒有營運物流配送中心，所以我們的方案就成為了優勢，而且有專人隨時提供服務。簡單來說，只要企業在物流配送中心寄存貨品後，就沒有其他事務，亦不用再為出貨煩惱。」

Meet George at:

Plenary Session 2

**Keeping the customer 'King'
in the e-commerce arena**

Date: 20 November

Time: 9:30am-11:00am

Venue: Main Forum

與 George 會面：

主題論壇2

電子商貿領域留客之道

日期：11月20日

時間：9:30am-11:00am

地點：主論壇