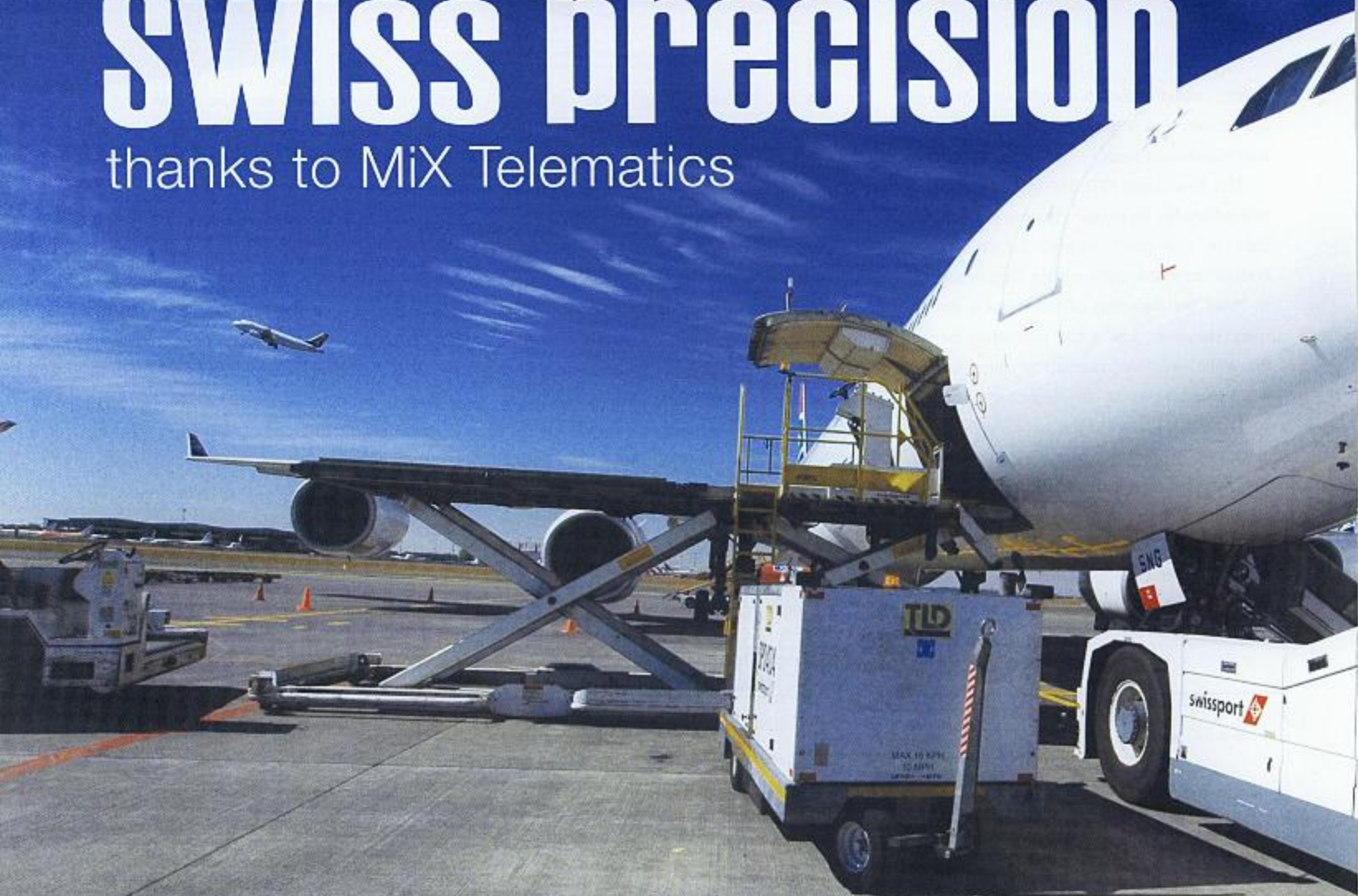


best practice

Swiss precision

thanks to MiX Telematics



Imagine working in an environment catering for millions of passengers each year, handling hundreds of thousands of tons of cargo – and never making a mistake. Around the world, ground handling and cargo services company Swissport does just that; but in South Africa, the Swiss company has an added weapon in its arsenal – MiX Telematics

Airports around the world epitomise the challenges implicit in the logistics business. Take OR Tambo International Airport, for example; South Africa's own air transport hub. Catering for over 17 million passengers each year, with more than 18 000 employees on site, the airport comprises a plethora of different companies, each making sure the day runs smoothly and travellers, their baggage and cargo get to their destinations – not to mention the planes themselves.

As the world's largest dedicated ground

services company, Swissport offers a wide array of services requiring a fleet of highly expensive and specifically designed vehicles and equipment.

For example, the company's aircraft ramp-handling services include the loading and unloading of aircraft; baggage sorting and transportation; cabin cleaning; crew transport; ground power units (GPUs); "push-back tugs"; and unit load device control. You don't necessarily need to understand precisely how an airport works to see the logistical challenges around operating a fleet of ground

servicing equipment alongside a number of other companies – in an area that covers thousands of square meters.

Naturally, the concept of ground servicing grew organically alongside the idea that, as aeronautics advanced, people and cargo no longer needed to be shipped around the world, but could be flown.

What's interesting about ground handling services, however, is that while planes, airports and even ground servicing equipment have become more sophisticated over the years, the management of ground-related services



Swissport



supposed to be, someone had to physically go and take a look, then log the confirmation on a clipboard," says Peter Frame, vice president of operations at Swissport South Africa.

"Everything was done manually. For example, if an aircraft tug needs to move an aircraft, it should be at the aircraft 15 minutes before departure. Previously, the only way to ensure the tug was where it was meant to be was for a ground staff member to physically check," he continues. "We have 12 aircraft tugs, and during peak hours between 6 and 8 am we move approximately 40 aircraft in and out of docking bays, often kilometres apart. Besides confirming which tug is where, there are logistical challenges in making sure we're utilising our tugs correctly. Top speed is 15 km/h, so you don't want to be moving a tug across the airport unnecessarily, or miss using your closest tug for the job."

An added complication is that flights can be delayed, aeroplanes can land early or depart late, so – despite strict schedules – nothing is ever cast in stone. "For years ground staff have moved around airports with clipboards, recording where different pieces of equipment are operating, for which clients, and for how long they are in use. It's simply the way our industry has always been run," says Frame.

That is until Swissport South Africa decided it wanted to install a system that would allow management to monitor its equipment. "We had no idea a system like the one MIX Telematics has designed for us was even possible," Frame admits. "What we wanted was a basic tracking system that allowed us to keep track of where our equipment was within the airport environment. We wanted to make sure our drivers weren't abusing the equipment, and we wanted a way to ensure that other companies and airlines weren't simply making use of our equipment because it was close and accessible."

According to Frame, aircraft tugs can cost

anywhere between R5 million and R15 million, while the dollies onto which baggage is loaded cost R50 000 each. "A dolly isn't even motorised," adds Frame. "It is the simplest thing in the world to lose in a big, busy airport."

What started off as a simple tracking exercise soon grew into a highly sophisticated telematics system – the first of its kind in South Africa and, possibly, even the world. "Once we chose MIX Telematics as our partner, the original tracking system we had in mind, and which was originally installed, quickly grew into a highly sophisticated monitoring system that was tailor-made for our specific needs," Frame explains.

According to him, the team at MIX Telematics soon realised that Swissport's business was based on hours. MIX Telematics's designers set to work creating a system that would support Swissport's activities.

"MIX created software mapping the various South African airports within which we operate," Frame continues. "The software has allowed us to see at a glance exactly where all our equipment is at any given time. It has made the monitoring and last-minute moving of our equipment not only easy, but reliable. Incorrect times can't be logged and the closest tug can always be used to accommodate a change in flight plan."

But the simple benefits of tracking have led to so much more. "We were expecting the benefits of monitoring our equipment," says Frame. "For example, clients who want to argue a particular billing can be given absolute proof of where and when we supplied our services. What we weren't expecting was a system that could safeguard our equipment beyond being able to know where it was at any given time."

Through creating a unique system designed specifically for ground handling and cargo requirements, MIX Telematics was able

has remained manual.

In a world first – and a prime example of the innovation for which South Africa has become renowned – South African-based telematics company MIX Telematics has changed the face of ground services handling; and it has done so through working closely with Swissport to revolutionise its business.

CHANGING BUSINESS

"In the past – and by that I mean just over three years ago – if we needed to know whether a piece of our equipment was where it was

to foresee where the system could go and what it could do for Swissport. Identification tags were created for all ground staff, and only these tags can activate any ground equipment.

For example, an aeroplane can no longer use a Swissport GPU without it being activated by a member of Swissport's ground crew. "GPUs are generators that run off diesel, and

the MiX Telematics system, this is a thing of the past.

"We can even monitor the idling of our tugs and other motorised equipment," he adds. "At the touch of a button we can see each of our vehicles and other equipment; where they are, what they're doing, and whether they are operating within their parameters. Because the system updates every 30 seconds, we're

and the tracking and control of our fleet is unsurpassed."

For Frame, the secret behind this success is MiX Telematics' willingness to find the perfect solutions for Swissport's unique needs. "It's a highly innovative company," he explains. "The designers first needed to understand airports and all the different facets involved in our business – which is

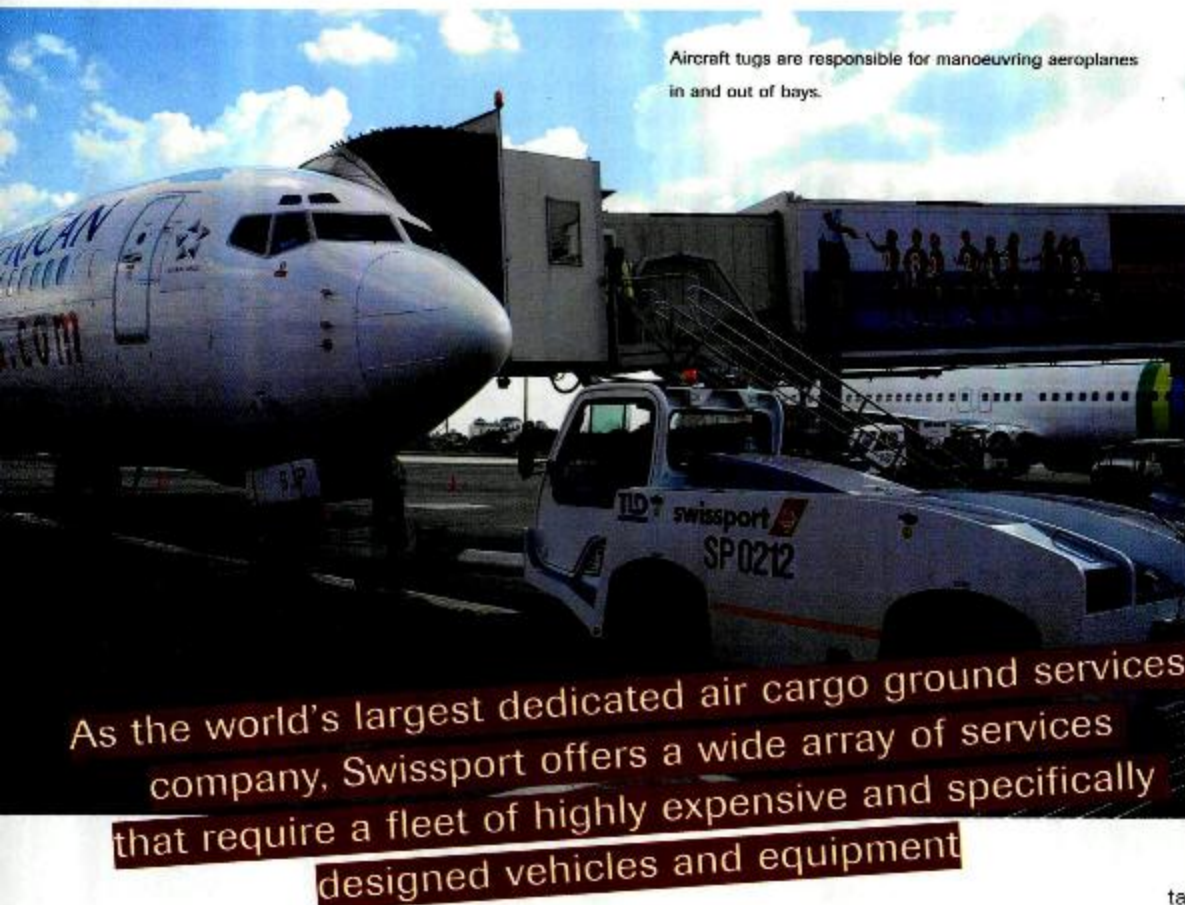
outside their normal realm of operations – before anything could be designed or installed. For example, there are so many different voltages across the various equipment used in airports that the design for each piece of equipment had to be slightly adjusted. But the MiX team grabbed the challenge with both hands, and, for us, the result is a whole new way of doing business."

In fact, Swissport South Africa's systems are so efficient that MiX Telematics will soon be presenting to Swissport's vice president of ground handling in emerging markets – with a view to installing its systems at Swissport's other operations.

"All our motorised equipment is put in place with tailor-made solutions from MiX

Telematics," says Frame. "This includes buses, GPUs, tugs, battery carts, baggage tractors, high loaders, pallet and baggage loaders and even cargo tractors. But the next challenge is designing a system for our non-motorised dollies. It's much harder to track and monitor non-motorised equipment, but we know the team at MiX will not only rise to the challenge, but find an ideal solution for our needs."

Swissport's attention to detail has made it the world's leading ground services company. But it is Swissport's ability and willingness to find better ways of operating that has allowed it to maintain this position as a market leader. ■



Aircraft tugs are responsible for manoeuvring aeroplanes in and out of bays.

As the world's largest dedicated air cargo ground services company, Swissport offers a wide array of services that require a fleet of highly expensive and specifically designed vehicles and equipment

are used to supply aircraft with power while they are on the ground," explains Frame.

"They are expensive to run, and we charge by the hour. Whereas before we relied on ground staff manually monitoring their usage, and we ran the risk of unauthorised and uncharged-for usage, now we have complete control over the units. They can't be started without us, we can measure how long they're idle, and we can start charging as soon as the aircraft begins drawing power. Standing around waiting for the aircraft to finish with the GPU – or checking that nothing happened to it – was very time consuming, yet that was what we had to do," Frame continues. With

always on top of things. It has revolutionised the way we do business."

MiX Telematics has created a customised solution that not only allows for Swissport's management and staff to monitor and plan all activities in real time, without physically needing to walk around the airport's tarmac, it protects the company's equipment in the long run, too.

"We no longer lose equipment; our service intervals – which are based on hours used – are well managed; and excessive idling can be monitored and eradicated," says Frame. "The system is revenue-capturing and it's cost effective; we have a great reward system in place for our drivers,