



The Marex Interview

## “My career has grown with Elektrans” says Head of Group IT, Mr Khanna

Well experienced IT strategist and senior manager, Mr Gaurav Khanna – IT Head at Elektrans, recently shared his experiences with Prisilla Nadar of Marex Media. In a brief conversation, he spoke about the importance of Information Technology in the shipping sector and how it has advanced the industry over a period of time.

His nine years of contribution at Elektrans Group include delivering enterprise IT strategy and architectural vision to steer a high growth organization. His scope of work revolves around ensuring zero downtime and hassle free IT service to the shore staff team as well as to crew onboard the growing Elektrans Fleet. He plays a fundamental role in IT capacity planning, administration and operational management, thereby ensuring efficient, stable, cost efficient, reliable and secure operations of the organization's IT platform. Pleasingly, with a new Group CEO joining in April 2016, the Group IT function and IT focus within the Elektrans Group will further excel and be given priority as a key strategy recently endorsed by the Elektrans Board.

### Excerpts from the interview:

#### How has Elektrans helped in shaping your career?

My career has grown with the organization, right from day-one when I joined. I have had the fortunate opportunity to work on various IT platforms for the Group, which very few IT professionals get exposed to during the early phases of their careers.

Today, I am responsible for the smooth operations of 250+ shore staff, 1500+ seafarers, an increased fleet, and various servers and applications operating within the organization globally.

#### How would you describe your career before and after Elektrans?

There has been a very evident transformation in my career. The field which I belong to does not offer one the opportunity to explore all the areas of the IT industry. It takes more than a life time to work on the various platforms offered by IT. With me being associated with Elektrans, I fortunately have had the liberty to work in all the necessary areas that need to be integrated to ensure the smooth function as per industry best standards. I was given the opportunity to propose to the management the areas that could be explored to keep us abreast with the latest technology, and thus the strategies towards the organization's growth in all dimensions. The exposure that I have received here may not have been offered to me in any other equivalent industry. Today, I am responsible for the entire IT infrastructure and architecture at Elektrans Group including the fleet of vessels we own and operate. I report directly to the Group CEO which makes me accountable for the consistent alignment of all the functions of the company, thus ensuring the adoption of best industry practices. That the Group IT function reports directly to the Group CEO also underlines the importance and priority given to IT within the Group.

#### What role has IT to play in the shipping sector?

Information Technology is an essential element and a strong foundation to an organization's growth. In today's world, it's not possible to operate without being technology focused and user friendly. IT plays a vital and active role in this sector. We give instructions to ships through the system driven software and we monitor and service our stakeholders via an IT platform. Use of IT in any organization results in substantial efficiency gains, optimized data management and MIS as improved service and quality consistency and enhanced business innovation.

The overall focus within the shipping sector on the use of IT is however lagging behind other industries. The global shipping community seems not yet to have truly embraced a more mature level of IT usage given the fact that the industry remains slightly conservative in embracing new technologies overall. A younger management generation within shipping is changing that, as they have a low to none barrier to the wide use of IT and ICT. Many new younger staff joining our shipping industry often express in contrast how surprised they are at how much purely paper and manual processes based they find the traditional shipping business. At Elektrans we are trying to do something about it step by step, and our investment into IT and ICT is growing for the same reason.

Shipping companies either look for one integrated ICT software solution or follow the 'best of breed' software approach with a multi fold of different applications which have proven to be best in their field of specific functionality. With better solutions in the market, a moving away from in-house developments and towards more integrated solutions from one vendor seems to grow. In Elektrans we go for the best of breed system and backend integrate with focus on master data management.

The shipping industry can in my view gain much more efficiency and cost savings if we further excel in the extended use of already well known and proven ICT in our officers as also on board our vessels.

#### What was your greatest challenge in implementing new technology on board ships?

**Availability:** The business needs high quality, highly available IT (or business) services. You need to find and liaise with agents for proper technicians who understand the complete requirement and deliver adjoining the marine interface.

**Cloud:** As cloud adoption continues we are looking at cloud as a technical or business solution, but availability of cloud driven solution is still a challenge at high seas where the ship sails to trade.

**Pricing:** Sometimes you have to procure IT products and services at very exorbitant prices through external sources when required to deliver to ships, due to inconvenient, remote and expensive locations.

**Training:** Training at all levels to initiate programs is a must, especially the marine interface.

#### What are the disadvantages of IT in the shipping sector?

IT is an integral part of the processes of the shipping industry and it plays an active role. The more you invest, the more useful it is across departments in terms of process and delivery. It improves communication through communication technology tools like telephones, video conferencing, electronic mail and databases. We need to better manage the new threat of cybercrime as do we need to ensure better backend integration of our systems and data. This seems to be an industry wide challenge and a must-do focus.

Improves data storage and file management: Businesses use cloud hosting services to store and backup business data. Also, it saves on paper work and makes transfer and access of data remote.

#### Tell us about your IT security features, please.

Today, IT users face threats like hacking, intrusions, etc. However, at Elektrans we

ensure that our information is kept safe and secure through multi layered protection systems. We have certain security standards which help us protect our data and avoid the threats. We have designed certain tools that identify and track these illegal activities and safeguard the Elektrans interest. We have recently launched a new IT security in-house study and gap analysis enable us get a more qualified picture of our IT and data security levels throughout our fleet and offices. We are planning a 3rd party 'stress test' of our safety barriers which will help us further safeguard our systems and data.

#### What are your major achievements at Elektrans?

I have done two major migrations here. The first one was when I migrated the in-house e-mail system to the cloud, singlehandedly in year 2010. Now our email system is an entirely cloud-based service from the ground up; so the IT department doesn't need to spend time and money maintaining desktop components.

The second was virtualization. When Doehle Danautic was transformed to Elektrans, we had to make an entire shift which was not an easy task. Everything had to be changed; data had to be migrated and security maintained during data transfer. With the help and support of my proficient team, this task was successfully handled.

We have converted our department into an eco-friendly department by reducing the number of servers with virtualization, including improved cost, security, efficiency and high availability.

#### How do you see your future here?

Over the years Elektrans has grown multi-fold and multi-dimensional and has achieved a significant market place in the maritime domain. With the organization still progressing with huge growth potential and continuing to expand also on a global footprint, I see myself growing and achieving exponentially in the times to come.

My responsibility will grow along with the growth of Elektrans. Hence, I have a vital role to play in future and I am affirmative in fulfilling my responsibilities diligently.

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