

SPECIAL REPORT: CAREERS IN TRANSPORT, LOGISTICS AND SUPPLY CHAIN

Work for those on their toes

Managing the forces of supply and demand is critical for profitability and jobs, writes **Clive Hopkins**.

WITH THE recent high-profile acquisition of container and stevedoring firm Patrick, Toll Group is now Australia's largest logistics and transportation company. "It's an exciting time," says Rod Walters, Toll's general manager for human resources.

"It's an industry that's achieving a lot of growth and getting a higher profile as companies realise the gains to be made from supply chain efficiency."

Toll Group employs about 30,000 "logistics specialists" - as Walters calls them - ranging from drivers, dockhands and technology specialists, through to lawyers and managers.

"We're a one-stop shop, a complete integrated logistics solution. This has been the vision of the company for the 12 years that I've been here. The only difference now is that that vision encompasses the whole of the Asian region."

In common with many companies, Toll is facing the challenge of an ageing population and consequent skills shortages.

As part of its brief to combat this, Toll has developed a program called Toll Virtual. In partnership with TDT (Transport Distribution Training) Australia, the program helps students in years 11 and 12 set up and operate a virtual business as part of their study program.

The students interact with other virtual industries, in Australia and abroad, gaining

valuable experience in marketing, business planning, scheduling and rostering. Toll also supplies mentors to help students with this program.

On another level, Toll provides industrial placements for undergraduates studying for logistics degrees at RMIT. Many of these students stay with the company, with some completing their degree part-time.

At the managerial level, the Toll MGSM strategic management program at Macquarie University has been going for five years.

Walters says, "The logistics industry is an exciting industry with fantastic growth opportunities and offers great career opportunities for young people."

"Supply chain optimisation" are the industry's current buzzwords - but what does it mean?

Carter McNabb, a partner at supply chain consultants GRA, explains: "There's a very popular restaurant in Sydney, apparently the 'fifth best in the world'. It's booked out several months in advance, and so knows exactly who's coming. And it serves a set degustation menu, so it knows exactly what they're going to eat."

"Compare this with a more typical restaurant, which may have 20 dishes on the menu and have no idea how many people might walk in the door."

"The first restaurant has taken the uncer-



Michael McManus ... first point of contact. Photo: Edwina Pickles

tainty out of the process and can plan the business very well. By contrast, the second restaurant can have as efficient a kitchen as possible, but it's the stocks of food that are crucial to the profitability of the business."

Of course, most businesses are closer to the second example than the first and that's where the likes of GRA can provide services. GRA helps businesses plan for the future by helping them reduce inventory and reduce the capital requirements to satisfy their customers.

The supply chain is now seen by business as a competitive advantage, rather than just as a cost.

McNabb says, "If you can respond quickly and efficiently to a customer, you have a competitive advantage."

As a separate industry, supply chain is expanding rapidly, with job titles such as "demand planning" and "supply chain strategy" becoming increasingly prominent.

So what kind of recruits are GRA and the wider industry looking for?

"We look for people who have analytical backgrounds in fields such as engineering or economics. Also, everyone we speak to has an open brief to find supply planners and demand planners - they're in very short supply."

Linda Clinch, HR manager, Oceania, for DHL Express says that the company is "always looking for people who like a fast-paced, dynamic environment". The company is looking for people with a range of skills, from operational, such as drivers and couriers, through to people with the logistical and analytical skills to track and interpret the data that is so crucial to efficient transportation.

Clinch says DHL's customer call centre in Brisbane is "constantly looking for good people to enter this area of our business. It's a good training ground to learn about our business processes and to build

He's a mover and a shaker

Michael McManus is a field sales executive for DHL Express at Artarmon.

With a geographical territory covering 10 to 12 suburbs, McManus is the first point of contact with customers in industries as varied as medical, IT and engineering.

If a company wants anything moved, they speak to him.

McManus worked for six years in residential real estate before joining DHL in January. His previous job was "a great experience and a great industry but I was looking to get into a more corporate selling role. The basics of selling are always the same - you adapt the skills to the product you're selling."

Why did he choose DHL?

"They're a market leader, with room and opportunity to move around and grow," he says. "I've told them I'm happy to look at interstate and overseas roles and those opportunities are there."

"I've met people who have been here 15 or 20 years but who are always doing something different, something more challenging."

"It says a lot about the industry and about the company in particular."

customer relations." Also, couriers are in a great position to learn about the company's needs, with many staff working their way up to more senior positions.

Australia is a mature market though the Asia-Pacific region still has great growth potential. As Clinch says, "Australia is looked to within the region as a country that can export talent and expertise, which opens up many possibilities for people who want to live and work overseas. One staff member, after just two years with the company, recently moved to Germany to lead a global e-learning project for the whole of DHL."