

The Miami Herald

Posted on Mon, Nov. 15, 2010

Datamyne mines for trade answers

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LO SAI HUNG / AP

Shipping containers stacked seven layers high at the Kwai Chung terminal at Hong Kong's port on Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2002. Asian ships have been stranded by the closure of ports on the West Coast of the United States, bad news for local port operators already suffering from competition from lower-cost terminals in China. (AP Photo/Lo Sai Hung)

The Port of Miami and Port Everglades ranked 11th and 12th, respectively in terms of cargo volume handled by U.S.

One Peruvian client wanted Datamyne to check how much asparagus was en route to the U.S. — while it was still on the water — to determine if market prices would go up or down.

Another might be interested in following shipments of ammonium nitrate — a common farm fertilizer but also a bomb ingredient — as a way to track down possible terrorists.

With more than 800 million records from 43 countries, Miami-based Datamyne has the largest searchable trade database in the

world.

And its data bank is growing annually by about 90 million records that are gleaned from official documents of trade ministries and customs authorities around the world.

Approximately 28,000 new records a day come in from the United States alone.

Those involved in international business — or even law enforcement — have all sorts of uses for such data, but for many Datamyne customers it comes down to wanting to know who is buying or selling so they can potentially do business with them, says Brendan McCahill, chief executive of the company.

Charlotte Gallogly, president of World Trade Center Miami, says that Datamyne fills a niche: “It is really hard to find good sources of information on companies by product.”

What companies want, for example, she says, “are the names of 10 buyers that buy a particular type of product — and that’s the toughest thing to come up with.”

McCahill says there are a lot of inconsistencies in the raw data collected by Datamyne so records are given at least two major scrubblings to weed out problems.

For example, data may list a container of Colombia flowers as weighing 90,000 pounds. But since Datamyne knows flowers are relatively light, the number will be corrected to 9,000 pounds.

Datamyne also sorts out transshipment data to determine the true country of origin of products, deletes extraneous punctuation marks and makes sure company names are uniform before producing customized online reports and graphs for clients.

Customers can also get a sign-on so they can do their own research on market share, what and how their competitors are shipping, where products are coming from and so on.

Sometimes, a customer will hit the jackpot, finding bills of lading that show not only the brands of products shipped but also serial numbers and value, but not all records are so detailed.

“It’s kind of like a mystery, connecting the dots for clients,” says Lisa Wallerstein, Datamyne’s vice president of marketing.

The company, for example, recently helped The Kansas City Star with an investigation on the popular dietary supplement fish oil. It found that although 20 percent of U.S. fish oil imports are from China — a country that has had problems in recent years with the safety of its food exports — they aren’t necessarily labeled as Chinese imports.

Sometimes crime also shows up in global trade patterns, says Wallerstein.

Datamyne can use its data, for example, to detect or trace counterfeit or gray market goods or to find if a licensed factory abroad is violating its contract by shipping to a third party.

By checking for certain key words, Datamyne also can track shippers or receivers of parts or chemicals that could be used to build bombs or missiles.

“A lot of this is driven by the post-9-11 environment,” says McCahill.

A customer won’t find U.S. export data on Datamyne, however. PIERS Global Intelligence Solutions, a rival global import and export information service, gets this data from the U.S. government and has a monopoly on it, says McCahill.

He should know. McCahill was president of PIERS before joining Datamyne in 2007. Datamyne, he said, is working on getting the U.S. government to release electronic files of the export data.

Datamyne has its roots in Uruguay in the early 1990s around the time the Mercosur trade treaties were being signed.

Pablo Milburn, whose family was involved in export/import, thought if he had data on transactions among the Mercosur countries it would put his family business a step ahead.

As Milburn, who is now executive vice president of Datamyne, built his database, he began to think he was really on to something.

In 2005, he piqued the interest of Nassau Point Investors, a Connecticut-based private investment group, that invested in Datamyne, allowing the company to expand and move its headquarters from Montevideo to Miami. The database center, however, has remained in Uruguay.

The company has 21 employees at the Blue Lagoon headquarters and 100 overall, including those in its offices in Montevideo and Buenos Aires.

Prices for customers run the gamut from \$300 a month for the Peruvian asparagus company that wants to track the product to stay competitive to as much as \$10,000 a month for a global shipping line that may have as many as 60 to 70 concurrent users of Datamyne records.

“We don’t work on the notion of one size fits all,” says McCahill.

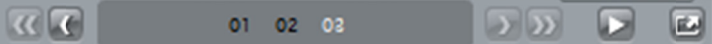
The company has just under 3,000 clients ranging from shipping giants, transportation companies, trading companies, exporters and importers, ports and trade associations to banks, law firms, consulting companies, real estate firms, embassies and law enforcement agencies.

Wallerstein also has discovered another use for the Datamyne records: “I love Argentine wine, and I’ll go into the database and find who is importing the brands that I like.”

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Brendan R. McCahill the CEO of Datamyne , the company takes in millions of trade reports from around the world and customizes them for clients all



WHAT YOU CAN LEARN FROM DATAMYNE

- Bill-of-lading data on cassava-based food products favored by many immigrants from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia can be useful in tracing the diaspora's migration to the United States. Costa Rica is the source of 88 percent of fresh or dried cassava imported into the United States.
- Nicaraguan and Cuban exports to Venezuela rose 761 percent and 624 percent, respectively, during the first half of 2010 compared to the first six months of 2008.