

Interview with Michael Richards, Bulk & Breakbulk Manager, Port of Portland

We sat down with one of AntwerpXL 2019's international visitors, Michael Richards, Bulk & Breakbulk Manager at the Port of Portland, to get his industry insights and ask about his experience of visiting the event earlier this year.

Industry Insights

In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges that the global breakbulk industry will face in the next 12 months?

The biggest challenge is around economic uncertainty. We've been hearing much about global economic headwinds coming from the ongoing U.S./China trade war and Brexit. We need to be mindful of our current growth rate and think strategically about where our investments are made.

What are the biggest issues specifically for Portland?

The biggest issue for the Port of Portland is probably our lack of market awareness we have as a breakbulk gateway. With a significant amount of available laydown space, direct ship to rail options, and close proximity to both major interstates and two class one railroad mainlines, we are ideally situated to provide services for both regular breakbulk vessel calls as well as project cargo shipments.

Portland is in a great position to be able to cost effectively service the interior Canadian market as well as the Northern United States. In the past, these markets have primarily been serviced by ports in the Gulf of Mexico – this has meant for long and costly rail or truck trips. Columbia River ports, including Portland, can significantly reduce the inland mileage required. We also have established and proven barge operations in the river that can deliver products several hundred miles inland, up into Idaho if needed. This option can greatly reduce the amount of permitting and specialized logistics planning needed for oversized products.

In your opinion, what has been the biggest success for the industry this year?

We've partnered with several ports and other breakbulk service providers in the Columbia River region to form the Columbia River [High Wide and Heavy Corridor](#). This has been a great step locally and has really increased our collaboration as a unified region looking to showcase our breakbulk capabilities. We aren't afraid to say that there's other competition in the river system as the ports of Longview, Morrow, and Vancouver are also part of the group. We welcome the friendly competition from the other members of our group as, collectively, we all want to spark new cargo moving through the river.

What has been your organisation's biggest accomplishment?

Earlier this year, we partnered with a major windmill company, Vestas, to move 150 wind turbine tower sections through our breakbulk terminal to Eastern Oregon, where they were destined for use on a wind project. This was the first time we had ever handled wind turbine parts across the dock. We're especially proud to be involved in facilitating the new wind project here in Oregon. The Port's ability to accommodate turbine components of this size was key to effectively and economically delivering the components for the project.

Thoughts on AntwerpXL

What made the event particularly effective in your opinion?

AntwerpXL's intimate, personal feel, provided us with the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations with plenty of trusted and exciting new business contacts. Larger events that we have been to in the past have often been overwhelming. Their inaccessibility can make it difficult to spend the time and attention required to network with industry professionals effectively. AntwerpXL, on the other hand, got the balance right in terms of hosting a great number of leading organisations, while not oversaturating the show floor.

What impressed you most about the event's exhibition?

All of AntwerpXL's exhibitors were incredibly approachable and willing to share best practice during conversations. Well-connected exhibitors were also open to sharing their contacts, particularly for the West Coast of the United States, which is where we do the majority of our work. All in all, we were immensely impressed with AntwerpXL's high calibre line-up of exhibitors.

What were the interesting take-outs for you within the conference programme?

Bob Delbecque's opening keynote on '*A Vision of the Future*' was unique, active and fresh. The energy that Bob brought into the room made his presentation particularly engaging. The talk focussed on the main drivers of the breakbulk industry, their likely impacts, and what changes the sector could be looking at across international markets, particularly engaging.

Areas of particular interest for the Port of Portland, such as the matter of offshore wind farms, were discussed during the conference programme. Offshore construction requires a lot of big equipment bolted to the seabed, deep-water ports for bringing in larger vessels, staging areas at ports for marshalling and mobilising, construction vessels, and special vessels for laying power transmission cables. AntwerpXL had such an attentive eye on these kinds of themes and industry matters of the future.

Was AntwerpXL successful in providing a platform for industry start-ups?

Although we were more interested in speaking with the industry's established shipping companies, it was pleasing to see that AntwerpXL provided a platform for start-ups to showcase their innovative products and services. In no way were they swallowed up by their larger competitors; on the contrary, their presence was prominent. In fact, the variety of organisations present at AntwerpXL, all of different sizes and operating in different niches, made for an interesting and exciting show floor.

How well were you able to network with industry professionals and do business?

The intimate feel of AntwerpXL made it easy to approach others and discuss industry matters. At the event's informal networking party, we talked to high-profile representatives from top industry

organisations. These conversations delivered business opportunities of benefit for the Port of Portland. There are very few other opportunities in existence for industry professionals to get under one roof and do business – AntwerpXL is an invaluable resource in this regard.

Would you recommend other organisations outside of Europe attend AntwerpXL 2020?

Yes, we absolutely plan to return ourselves. A common misconception is that because the event is stationed in Europe, it's only relevant for companies that do business in the continent. This really isn't the case. We, for instance, conduct the majority of our business in the Pacific Ocean; yet, given the interconnectivity of the companies that make-up AntwerpXL's network, we were easily able to gather contacts that will advance our business across the West Coast of the United States.

Would you like to share any additional comments about AntwerpXL?

It was fantastic that an event focused on the niche of breakbulk was hosted in a port city at the very heart of the European breakbulk market. Aside from the event itself, the city of Antwerp was so impressive – great hotels and plenty to see and do.

About Port of Portland

Established in 1891, the Port of Portland oversees Portland International Airport, general aviation, and marine activities in the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area in the United States. The Port owns four marine terminals and three airports and manages five industrial parks.