



# Delivering INNOVATION

UNI-CHARTERING is offering custom, innovative shipping services and solutions to customers across the globe.

Images by Jerry Nielsen

As the world's markets continue to shift in the ebb and flow of the global economic sea, UNI-CHARTERING is offering its clients leading-edge, streamlined shipping services and solutions. With offices in Denmark, France, Turkey, and the United States, UNI-CHARTERING can deliver services and solutions to ship owners, investors, brokers, and partners with ease, no matter what market they're in.

These services include the commercial management of tankers, operation of tankers, time charter arrangements, new building projects, joint ventures, and general ship brokering. While these services may be offered by other companies, UNI-CHARTERING's difference is its dedication to delivering modern technology with

an environmental consciousness. Its values of reliability, honesty, flexibility, proactiveness, teamwork, and an open-minded approach are the firm foundations that hold the company together.

Responding to an urgent need in the market for reliable and customised service, UNI-CHARTERING was established in 2008 at the height of the economic recession. Despite these troubling times, the company has flourished thanks to a dedication to responding and adapting to customers' needs.

UNI-CHARTERING's parent company, financial group United Shipping & Trading Company (USTC), provides the business with easy access to specialists with broad background within the world of shipping, and extensive knowledge in risk management,

bunker supply, door-to-door logistic solutions, ship owning, and financing.

Like USTC, UNI-CHARTERING is headquartered in the old maritime city of Middelfart, Denmark. This office serves as the base for the company's global reach, stretching to its offices in Istanbul, Nice, and Houston. Despite its impressive size and reach, UNI-CHARTERING manages to retain the responsiveness, independence, and innovation of a small firm when serving its customers and collaborating with partners.

UNI-CHARTERING's CEO, Per Ekmann, recently revealed his plans for growth to *The CEO Magazine* as the company continues to lead its industry and venture into uncharted waters. ›



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**The CEO Magazine:** What is your professional background, leading up to your time at UNI-CHARTERING?

**Per:** I was involved in professional military services, followed by work in the UN forces. Then, I worked as a shipbroker and then as managing director for a transport company. I'm now CEO of UNI-CHARTERING.

**Throughout your time with UNI-CHARTERING, what have been the greatest challenges you've faced?**

I would say the general financial situation across the globe, especially in shipping, has been the biggest challenge. To get the finances in place for new ships and new markets—you need quite a lot of cash to run a shipping business.

Normally we are able to make agreements with the banks or financial institutions for a period of around three to five years so we don't have to discuss it every year. We have been able to make long-term packages for financing with our banking partners and that has definitely helped us through the stormy financial recession since 2008.

**With UNI-CHARTERING operating on an international scale, how do operations vary between the different regions that you're in?**

We provide the same service from all four offices across the globe. We do the commercial side and we also do operational stuff. Whether you're a customer from Istanbul or from Houston, the customer will see and get the same service and package deal.

What is different is the way we deal with customers, and that can be because of history, expectations, or even because of religion. We have done it in such a way that our four managers for our four offices have enough power and autonomy to run things smoothly. They don't need to keep checking back in with head office for every decision.

We are global on a local perspective. We have decided to have local employees in all our offices. We have to be firm about the way we want our business to be run and the fundamentals and ideas behind it. We've found that it's very helpful to send out some skilled Danish people to a new office, while also hiring locals with a lot of power and the abilities to

decide and do business effectively, more or less on their own.

**Innovation is also a major part of your company's philosophy. How does UNI-CHARTERING ensure continual improvement?**

We do it in several ways. First of all, we have launched a new strategic plan, which we do every second year. We've announced our new one from May this year, which is looking three years ahead. Prior to doing this, we did some interviews with our clients and we commissioned the best advisers to help us figure out how to proceed, where to improve, where we are doing well, and where we stand out compared to our competitors.

We undertook some market research with a global advisory organisation about where they expected the biggest growth for shipping and where we should put our eggs. From those sources, we've made this plan for the next three years and it's shared not only internally with our employees but also with key customers.

**How does UNI-CHARTERING collaborate with key partners and suppliers to ensure success in product development and customer service?**

After each job has been completed, we have a re-cap where we discuss how it went, how the delivery was completed, and any other issues, comments, or concerns. It also goes the other way—if we've been delayed or our ship has broken down we need to address this and offer solutions. We also have annual meetings with key customers where we decide not only prices but the way forward. We listen to what their needs are and what we can deliver so we can tailor-make a solution for them.

**What does the future hold for UNI-CHARTERING?**

The future holds more ships, more personnel, and two more offices, perhaps one in the Far East. Right now we are spread across the world, though you could say that

we don't have a presence in the Far East, which would be the next area we want to develop in. We could open an office in Singapore because there seems to be a lot going on there and we can't just ignore it with the size we have now. We try to have a global perspective on a local base. That means that we want to be where our customers are.

From the owner side, our owner is very focused on buying more ships and launching a product where we build a shipyard tailor-made for our customers' needs.

**How do you plan to implement these changes and move into a new market?**

We've already taken the first step with analysts compiling some reports for us focusing on our size, our part of the business, and whether there's a market for us in the Far East. We got these reports and on the back of that we decided that we should go there and have meetings with potential key customers and brokers.

We did that around five months ago. I was out there with my commercial manager for a week and we listened to them, we got some good responses, and we realised that this could be a real possibility for us.

The second step is to make a business plan for that market, which we're doing now, and then present it to the board of directors. I would say that we could be ready to move into the Far East in six to 12 months. We've already expanded quite a lot and the focus is now on obviously making profits but also developing what we have now from our four offices and our fleet of 36 ships.

The key for us is our personnel and I think we've got the best brokers and operators. We've simply got the best staff and we have the best owner. He loves shipping; it's his passion. We have very good financial possibilities and cooperation with our bankers so the future looks bright. •

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- Per Ekman



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