SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING IMMEDIATE CONFIRMATION FOR SHIPPING SERVICES

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/619,848, filed April 3, 2012, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] 1. Field of the Invention

[0003] The present invention generally relates to shipping services. In particular, the present invention relates to methods and related systems for providing instant confirmation from a carrier to a shipper for the booking of shipping services.

[0004] 2. Description of the Related Art

[0005] When a person or company wishes to ship goods ("the shipper"), the shipper must contact an appropriate shipping company (hereinafter collectively termed "the carrier") either directly or through an intermediary, such as a freight forwarder, carrier booking company or the like. In most cases, this requires telephonically or otherwise contacting the carrier, providing a description of the goods to be shipped, and awaiting upon an Ocean Carrier Booking Number ("OCBN") for one or more slots on a vessel. This manual process is both time-consuming and tedious for the shipper. Although methods exist for the electronic exchange of information between a carrier (or its representative, such as a freight forwarder) and a shipper, such as Electronic Data Exchange (EDI) as developed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, such systems nevertheless do not permit a shipper to receive instant (i.e, within 5 minutes or less) confirmation of slots from a carrier.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005a] In accordance with one aspect, there is provided a method for reserving shipping slots on a vessel, the method comprising: accepting for pre-allocation from a carrier at least one slot of a voyage on the vessel; accepting at least one shipping rule for the at least one slot; accepting a booking request from a shipper to reserve the at least one slot on the vessel; accepting shipping information corresponding to the booking request; correlating at least a portion of the shipping information against the at least one shipping rule to determine if the booking request can be

accepted; and in response to determining that the booking request can be accepted: providing the at least a corresponding carrier booking number to the shipper; and indicating that the at least one slot is reserved.

[0005b] In accordance with another aspect, there is provided a system for reserving shipping slots on a vessel, the system comprising: at least a central processing unit; communications hardware coupled to the at least a central processing unit and configured to communicate with a carrier and a shipper; and memory coupled to the at least a central processing unit and comprising a database and program code, the program code executable by the at least a central processing unit to perform steps comprising: accepting for pre-allocation from the carrier at least one slot of a voyage on the vessel and storing information corresponding to the pre-allocation of the at least one slot in the database; obtaining at least a corresponding carrier booking number for the at least one slot and storing information corresponding to the at least a corresponding carrier booking number in the database; accepting at least one shipping rule for the at least one slot and storing information corresponding to the at least one shipping rule in the database; accepting a booking request from the shipper to reserve the at least one slot on the vessel; accepting shipping information from the shipper corresponding to the booking request; utilizing the database to correlate at least a portion of the shipping information against the at least one shipping rule to determine if the booking request can be accepted; and in response to determining that the booking request can be accepted: providing the at least a corresponding carrier booking number to the shipper; and indicating in the database that the at least one slot is reserved.

[0005c] In accordance with another aspect, there is provided a system for reserving shipping slots on a vessel, the system comprising: at least a central processing unit; communications hardware coupled to the at least a central processing unit and configured to communicate with a shipper; and memory coupled to the at least a central processing unit and comprising a database and program code, the program code executable by the at least a central processing unit to perform steps comprising: utilizing the database to determine availability of at least one slot of a voyage on a vessel; associating at least a corresponding carrier booking number for the at least one slot and storing information corresponding to the at least a corresponding carrier booking number in the database; creating at least one shipping rule for the at least one slot and storing information corresponding to the at least one shipping rule in the database; accepting a booking request from a shipper to reserve the at least one slot on the vessel; accepting shipping information from the

shipper corresponding to the booking request; utilizing the database to correlate at least a portion of the shipping information against the at least one shipping rule to determine if the booking request can be accepted; and in response to determining that the booking request can be accepted: providing the at least a corresponding carrier booking number to the shipper; and indicating in the database that the at least one slot is reserved.

[0006] In ~~one aspect~~example embodiments, a method, and corresponding system, is disclosed for reserving shipping slots on a vessel. The method includes accepting for pre-allocation from a carrier slots on a voyage on the vessel, corresponding carrier booking numbers for the slots, and shipping rules for the slots. Then, a booking request from a shipper is accepted to reserve one or more of the pre-allocated slots on the vessel, together with shipping information for the booking request. The

shipping information is correlated against the shipping rules for the slots to determine if the booking request can be accepted. If the booking request can be accepted, the carrier booking number corresponding to the reserved slots are then provided to the shipper, and the corresponding slots are marked as reserved.

[0007] In ~~preferred~~ one embodiments, a notification is provided to the carrier indicating that the booking request has been accepted, which notification includes the shipping information.

[0008] In ~~other~~ another embodiments, the pre-allocation of slots and corresponding business rules and carrier booking numbers are associated on a vessel-voyage level. Additional, container yard information may be accepted on the vessel-voyage level for the pre-allocated slots.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] The various aspects and embodiments disclosed herein will be better understood when read in conjunction with the appended drawings, wherein like reference numerals refer to like components. For the purposes of illustrating aspects of the present application, there are shown in the drawings certain preferred embodiments. It should be understood, however, that the application is not limited to the precise arrangement, structures, features, embodiments, aspects, and devices shown, and the arrangements, structures, features, embodiments, aspects and devices shown may be used singularly or in combination with other arrangements, structures, features, embodiments, aspects and devices. The drawings are not necessarily drawn to scale and are not in any way intended to limit the scope of this invention, but are merely presented to clarify illustrated embodiments of the invention. In these drawings:

[0010] Fig. 1 is functional diagram of an embodiment system.

[0011] Fig. 2 is an example user interface that enables a carrier to pre-allocate slots on a vessel voyage basis.

[0012] Fig. 3 is an example user interface that enables carrier to indicate container yards for slots on a vessel voyage basis.

[0013] Fig. 4 is an example user interface that enables a carrier to set shipping business rules for slots on a vessel voyage basis.