

# INTERNATIONAL Cruise & Ferry REVIEW



EUROPEAN  
CRUISE  
SERVICE

**CATERPILLAR**



**Micky Arison lays out  
Carnival Corporation's growth strategy**

**Gerry Cahill unveils top priorities**

**Stein Kruse outlines HAL's raison d'etre**

**MSC's Pellegrino details 2010 masterplan**

**FCCA's Paige stresses importance of  
training and first class customer service**

# Critical crew telecommunications taken to the next level



With more cruise ships in service than ever before, and at least 18 more scheduled to enter the market in 2008 and 2009, the existing shortage of trained crew will increase. Recruiting and retaining experienced and quality crew will become even more competitive as cruise lines seek to staff new ships and minimize attrition of existing crew.

Two recent and independently conducted surveys of crewmembers support the view that the ability to communicate with family and loved ones at home in a convenient and cost-effective way remains of critical importance to crewmembers.

Nearly a decade ago shipboard prepaid calling began being offered to crewmembers. Before then it was inconvenient, as well as expensive, for the crew to call home. Emergency calls to and from ships, placed by radio officers via satellite were costly, and long

lines for phones at call centres in ports were common. While this was a major innovation at the time, aside from declining rates, little has been done since then to enhance voice telecommunications for the crew.

As the use of the internet and email became widespread, internet cafés began appearing on ships for use by passengers as well as crew. This was an improvement in crew communications, both in convenience and value. A couple of years later, wi-fi was rolled out and became a standard shipboard amenity for the increasing numbers of crew who own or have access to a laptop. This again was an improvement in convenience and, combined with lower rates, greatly improved the ability of crewmembers to communicate with their families at home.

The next significant innovation in shipboard telecommunications will be completely transparent to passengers

Next came mobile phone service, now offered or planned on virtually every cruise ship. Access to shipboard mobile services, however, is limited to users who have international roaming service through their home carriers (shipboard calling or maritime roaming is considered international roaming). Nearly all crewmembers use a prepaid mobile service purchased either in their home country or in ports of call. While there are emerging standards that support international roaming for prepaid users, maritime roaming for prepaid users is still the exception, not the rule. Rates for maritime roaming are typically \$2.50 to \$3 per minute and, while this may be acceptable for passengers who cruise once or twice a year, it is not practical for crewmembers who work contracts of six to 10 months at a time. For these reasons, even though shipboard mobile service has proven to be well accepted by passengers, it has not been widely used by crew.

Recently the next step in the continuum of technological advancement occurred. Wireless Maritime Services of Miramar Florida began offering a new service designed specifically for crewmembers. This service, CrewzFöne, is already operating on two ships and allows crewmembers to use their own

mobile phones to make and receive calls, as well as use text messaging.

The important distinctions between existing services and the CrewzFöne service are three-fold: access, rates, and text messaging.

The existing prepaid services for crew use the shipboard PBX, which typically has a limited capacity and can support between four and 12 simultaneous calls. The crew must place those calls from a wired shipboard phone, which is not always convenient or private. The CrewzFöne system is scalable so there is always available lines to place calls and, because crewmembers are able to use their own mobile phones, they can utilize features such as their address book and voice mail, and can make and receive calls in privacy.

Rates for the CrewzFöne service can be determined by each cruise line, but will inevitably fall within a couple of cents per minute of the existing prepaid services. Because CrewzFöne is prepaid and sends users a text message with their new balance at the end of each call, crewmembers can manage their budget easily.

This is a huge improvement in convenience for the crew.



To use CrewzFöne, crewmembers make a one-time purchase of a prepaid Sim card (which includes a phone number) from a vending machine onboard the ship. They can then place and receive calls and text messages from their own mobile phones at special rates that are competitive with existing shipboard prepaid services and what is offered shoreside. They can also top-off their account via the same vending machine and can keep the same phone number that is assigned to their Sim card.

### Cruise lines that become early adopters of this service will have an advantage in recruiting and retaining quality crewmembers

However, the real impact from the CrewzFöne offering is not in voice calling but that CrewzFöne supports text messaging. Text messaging usage is growing rapidly in North America, particularly among younger users, but is still not as widely accepted and used as in the rest of the world. Texting worldwide is prolific and in some countries where crewmembers are recruited, texting exceeds voice usage on mobile phones. In the Philippines, for example, more than one billion text messages are sent each month.

For crewmembers, this is like writing a letter home and having it delivered within a second. They can then receive a "letter" from home, within seconds and for less than the cost of postage stamp or checking their email.

As this service is deployed industry wide over the next few months, text messaging will play a major role in changing shipboard life for the better. Cruise lines that recognize the importance of this service and become early adopters will have an advantage in recruiting and retaining quality crewmembers. ■



Rob Marjerison, a 20 year veteran of the cruise industry, is a recognized authority on shipboard telecommunications and on-board revenue. A regular contributor to various industry publications, Mr. Marjerison is Chief Operating Officer of Wireless Maritime Services, LLC based in Miramar, Florida.