

THE *Hoplite*



perspectives.

How has the cross-border landscape changed over the last decade? We asked those who know best for their thoughts.

Featuring our friends at





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It is an understatement to say this year has flown by. Our launch in January seems both yesterday and several years ago simultaneously. While time has passed extraordinarily fast, we feel we've made the most of it, and Q3 was no exception.

We attended some very special events, two in particular I'd like to acknowledge:

- The Modernization of Cross-Border Trade in Laredo presented by Reliance Partners
- The Karen Cameron ALS Charity Golf Tournament in Nashville presented by Bitfreighter

These were fantastic, class act events by two fantastic partners that I'd recommend everyone checking out in 2025.

We added team members to our organization. I'd like to highlight Andrew Konrath, Cindy Carrillo, and Guillermo Sanmiguel for quickly making an impact for us.

We visited and added customers and carrier partners alike, both in the US and Mexico. We always appreciate the faith shown in a young company such as ours, and we take pride in rewarding that faith every chance we get.

It is a delicate balancing act trying to grow aggressively while making calculated, responsible decisions that don't jeopardize the service. While we haven't been perfect, we're definitely proud of the decisions we've made and service we provide. My own expectations for our first year were lofty, but we're right on pace and growing. I'm both grateful and proud of that, and we can't wait to see what Q4 brings.

Thank you for all of the support.



Q3 REWIND





perspectives.

The current Mexico cross-border landscape looks much different than it did when the original NAFTA agreement came into place. With the continued development of manufacturing and nearshoring comes evolution and greater sophistication. So how much has really changed in the last ten years? What could be in store for the next ten years? We spoke to those in the industry with a unique perspective to get an idea.

Meet our panel:



**MATT
SILVER**

Co-Founder & CEO
CARGADO



**FABIO
COMES**

AVP of Sales, Mexico
BISON TRANSPORT



**CARLOS
CANALES**

VP of Business
Development
WISDOM LOGISTICS



**BRYAN
REKOWSKI**

Co-Founder & COO
HOPLITE LOGISTICS

From your perspective, what has changed the most in the last ten years in the cross-border industry? What are few big changes you think we will see in the next ten years?



MATT SILVER: I'm going to start on a macro level. Over the past decade alone, trade between the United States and Mexico has seen remarkable growth, expanding by 58%, from \$493 billion in 2012 to \$779 billion in 2022. This has been accelerated by market dynamics such as the pandemic, trade war with China, and USMCA. But we're just at the tip of the iceberg when it comes to demand in Mexico. Companies like Tesla, Mattel, Unilever, and Kia Motors are investing billions of dollars collectively in their manufacturing footprint in Mexico and many other companies have vowed to do the same. As these manufacturers increase their production in Mexico, so too does the strain on a fragile industry that relies on outdated systems to solve complex operational challenges. From a people perspective, those who are based in border cities are just as welcoming today as they were when I first visited Laredo ten years ago. What's changed is their willingness to adopt new partnerships and new technology. There weren't a ton of brokers moving cross-border freight ten years ago, besides the big guys and a few smaller players, and most carriers worked directly with shippers or through 3PLs who were managing that freight. Today, the cross-border space is a lot more fragmented as more brokers have established a footprint and more shippers have started moving freight out of Mexico.



CARLOS CANALES: Cross-border operations have evolved tremendously in quite a few areas. US-Canada-Mexico trade's continuous growth is supported by a re-engineered North America Trade Agreement to the USMCA agreement and Mexico's evolution to more sophisticated manufacturing with higher quality standards and complexity levels are a few to start. The US society has also naturally evolved from manufacturing to a more service-oriented

country and international trade facilitation has improved dramatically. Technology has also been a determinant factor to open the border's traditional "black box" to a transparent environment for improved visibility and tracking. In the years to follow, we would expect infrastructure and technology to have an impact in cross-border clearance agility with actions like a regional approach to creating a safe and agile environment. It's currently local. Modernized infrastructure plus warehousing/storage capacity fostering automation and AI solutions would be helpful, as would improved border-crossings with bridge capacity expansions and additional ports of entry. We can anticipate a more mature Customs Clearance process that is automated with non-invasive authority inspections. Autonomous vehicles and/or a "hybrid" model are also a **must** in commercial transportation to support against driver scarcity. International agreements to allow a certain number of drivers brought from abroad to expand driver base and neutralize transportation issues is something needed as well.

"From a people perspective, those who are based in border cities are just as welcoming today as they were when I first visited Laredo ten years ago. What's changed is their willingness to adopt new partnerships and new technology." -Matt Silver



FABIO COMES: From my perspective, there are five key changes that have taken place in the last 10 years with regards to cross border trade. First, the growth of nearshoring and trade agreements. Nearshoring trends also increased because of disruptions in the supply chain overseas due to the Pandemic. This has driven manufacturing and distribution to North America and is reshaping supply chains with less focus on China and more focus on Mexico. Second, Mexico has significantly invested in their infrastructure (*road and rail*), particularly in border areas like Tijuana and Nuevo Laredo. There has been a push to

streamline cross-border routes to handle increasing volumes more efficiently both road and intermodal. Third, digitalization where cross-border processes have become more automated with digital customs clearance systems, real-time tracking, and the electronic logging of shipments. Border cities are constantly working towards integrating technology to help reduce delays and traffic. Fourth, we have seen the rise of e-commerce significantly increase the demand for fast, reliable cross-border trucking services. Mexico has become a critical part of U.S. and Canadian companies' supply chains. This shift has driven demand for expedited shipping and more strategic solutions. Fifth, environmental regulation has been a rising focus on sustainable transportation, green initiatives, and efficiencies. Although the U.S. and Canada have more regulations in place, Mexico is starting to align with international emissions standards. This has led to increased regulations requiring trucking companies to upgrade fleets, trailers, and investment in cleaner technology.



BRYAN REKOWSKI: I think the resources for shippers have increased dramatically. I remember when large enterprise shippers came to us asking if we could help move freight out of Mexico as it was all being transloaded and they had no control over the MX portion or costs. Now there are so many options for these shippers and they have a much more streamlined cross-border process which is now encompassed into their network RFQ's. They also understand their own cross-border supply chain better, so that has been a big step. In the next ten years I think we will see infrastructure be forced to catch up with increased nearshoring, likely pushing expansion of more bridges across the major and minor crossing points. With the increased cost, lack of space and dwindling resources in areas like Monterrey, I could see shippers choosing to or being forced to set up manufacturing in more remote regions or those closer to smaller crossing ports like Nogales, Reynosa, Tecate, and San Luis Rio. It will be very exciting to see how the continued investment in Mexico impacts the North American supply chain.

When you think about tech in the cross-border space, what is the biggest challenge to overcome to achieve mass adoption?



CANALES: The biggest challenge to achieving mass tech adoption in cross-border logistics lies in overcoming the complexities of accessing data, producing relevant content, and driving engagement and collaboration among users.



REKOWSKI: I think there are too many systems that cannot communicate with each other. We'll have to see this occur with the crossing process at the border to bridge the paperwork, language, and currency gap before different providers in the cross-border process can truly be integrated for a swift and seamless crossing.



SILVER: Breaking people from the habit of using WhatsApp. Yes, we integrated Cargado into WhatsApp but we want to pull people out of that unstructured mess and create structure for them.



COMES: The cross-border space will experience significant shifts that will be driven by evolving technology, regulatory changes, and economic developments. Overcoming the challenges in regulations, infrastructure, and willingness to adopt new tools will require a collaborative effort across North America borders. A few examples, in my opinion are the standardization across borders of tech, infrastructure, costs for smaller carriers that lack financial resources to invest in tech, and driver shortages and training for new technologies.



"In the next ten years I think we will see infrastructure be forced to catch up with increased nearshoring, likely pushing expansion of more bridges across the major and minor crossing points."

-Bryan Rekowski



Being a cross-border-focused brokerage means dealing with some very difficult decisions with regard to risk. Many of the safeguards present within the US that we use for carrier vetting are non-existent within Mexico, which can make sourcing trustworthy and reliable options difficult without a previous relationship present. Finding pricing and US carriers willing to service particular corridors within Mexico is also quite difficult at times. Enter our friends at **Cargado**, who can help with risk mitigation, carrier sourcing, and pricing discovery. Hoptite saw the natural strategic fit between both companies and signed on as a customer early with Cargado. The experience has been fantastic, so we've chosen them as our Q4 partner to highlight, and encourage anyone looking to move cross-border Mexico loads to give them a look at www.cargado.com. We sat down with their **CEO and Co-Founder Matt Silver** to discuss the platform and industry.

After being an early adopter I think it's very clear how impactful your product can be for a young brokerage or brokerage trying to scale their cross-border. How would you say you can bring value to the larger more established brokers who already have a lot of cross-border business?

MATT SILVER: We are bringing them a much more efficient and effective cross-border experience. They can get freight booked 24/7 and without getting on a call by using our no-touch booking. Large brokers are also moving a lot more transactional freight and naturally work with more carriers. With that come two important dynamics: there's a lot more detail that needs to be communicated to those carriers, and brokers want to keep expanding their network of trusted carriers. Cargado solves both of those pain points, as we enable brokers to more accurately broadcast their volume to a larger group of carriers and help them expand their carrier base. Finally, even the most experienced cross-border brokers have a desire to grow their Mexico business with the rise of nearshoring and Cargado has helped them do that. We make it easier to get their freight booked so they can go find new Mexico business.

With so much theft, how does Cargado create a safe space for brokers and carriers?

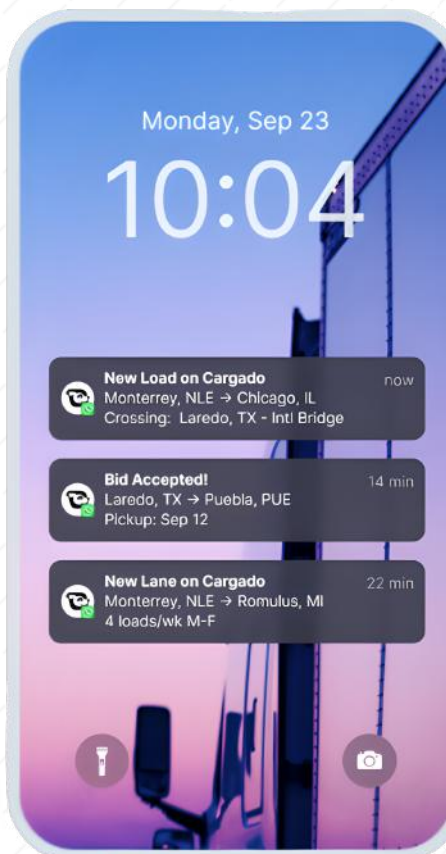
MS: We believe that a great load board must play a significant part in preventing fraud and double-brokering. To that end, while our product is free for trucking companies, we are invite-only. This means we rely on referrals, but also meet the owners or senior executives of the companies before they get access. This also means we need to have people on the ground meeting and onboarding carriers in person so we can actually shake hands and see their operation. We are also planning to build additional products to make the experience even more secure but we're not quite ready to share our plans there. Stay tuned.

What has been most enjoyable for you during this new journey?

MS: Honestly, I've said this before but I feel like I get to live vicariously through all of you, the brokers, who are using Cargado. I thankfully don't get the 11pm phone calls, although we're on an email chain right now that's 48 messages deep between a broker and a carrier and it's causing a lot of anxiety even though we're not involved. I love selling our product to people who genuinely enjoy using it and I have the confidence that people will love it because I've done the jobs you're all doing and I know what this software can do to make your lives easier.

For carriers, what are the short-term and long-term benefits to using Cargado and why should they continue to communicate through your platform? Do you think you'll attract US carriers interested in partnering with a MX carrier to move cross-border?

MS: Carriers have a desire to keep communication within Cargado because it ensures that everything is easily tracked and that our support team can help out in case of any issues or questions. In the short-term, they like using Cargado because more of their trucks get loaded and they can expand their broker network. We've facilitated hundreds of matches between unique broker and carrier pairings. Long-term, we want carriers to say "I've bought more trucks because Cargado expanded my business". We've seen that happen for carriers who use the platform regularly and I'd see success as hearing that message daily. Regarding US carriers to establish partnerships — we want to see cross-border capacity grow in every way possible, whether it's smaller carriers using Cargado to grow their fleet or helping an existing US carrier expand into Mexico. I'm more than happy to introduce those US carriers to the right partner carriers in Mexico to establish interchange agreements and also happy to talk the company through what it takes to expand into Mexico as a carrier.



With as much information as you are willing to give, what is Cargado doing 5 years from now or at the least how do you hope to impact the cross-border landscape?

MS: From the beginning, our goal has been to be the first collaborative platform for cross-border logistics, a product that actually elevates the industry. In 5 years we plan to have achieved a lot more in service of that mission and want to have played a key role in making North American logistics interconnected, dependable, and transparent. Our vision is that brokers and carriers come to Cargado first knowing it's the most dependable, secure way to get their loads and trucks covered. We envision a fully integrated freight experience wherein Cargado sits at the center of that.

HOPLITE SPOTLITE: ROB CONARD

The man, the myth, the Reverend.



Meet Rob Conard, aka Rev, Hoplite's first Customer Sales hire and former refrigerated freight extraordinaire. Rob's leadership, integrity, team-first mentality, and perseverance have made him invaluable to the future of Hoplite. We highlight him for Q4 as our **HOPLITE SPOTLITE!**

Question: Easy one to start. Tell me a little about yourself.

Rob Conard: Well, I'm a father of, soon to be, two little girls. One four and another due November 21st. I'm a logistics lifer, and husband to my beautiful wife. Born and raised in Kansas City. I've spent stints of time living in Chicago and San Diego working in the industry. I'm an avid Chiefs and Royals fan and in my spare time I enjoy running, hunting, fishing and anything that involves the outdoors. On the off chance my wife and I can pawn the kids off on grandma and grandpa, you can probably find us at a country music concert somewhere with our boots and flannel on.

Q: How did you get into logistics?

RC: In 2010, I had just graduated from the University of Kansas (Rock Chalk) and I applied to a bunch of law schools. I was absolutely positive I wanted to be a lawyer. I was broke, as most college kids are, so I couldn't afford all the application fees and then starting school again in the fall without a few months to replenish the funds. So, I applied to start in the winter semester of law school and decided I'd work for a few months until then. I was doing some farm and landscape work when I got a call from a company I'd applied to on a whim. Tracking and tracing trucks. The company was Freightquote.com. It paid more than the farm job, so I took it. Within 3 months, they promoted me from a tracker to a carrier sales role, I got my first taste of sales and commission and never looked back. I still watch Law and Order and pretend to be a lawyer from time to time though.

Q: What is the most rewarding thing about your role?

RC: Logistics is a bit of a puzzle. Solving countless equations at the same time happening very fast. The most rewarding part is when you gain the trust of a customer, and they recognize that you are a pivotal piece in solving their logistics puzzle. Trust is one of the pillars of this industry. Trust is not given lightly and easy to lose. Someone trusts you with their product.

The lifeblood of their business. When I care for that, as if the product was my own, and successfully get it to the store shelves or end user, there is a feeling unlike any other. Telling friends and family that you are a part of the process of the products they use day in and day out because you earned that trust, is unmatched.

Q: What is the ideal customer or partner you like to work with?

RC: I'm a bit of a beer nerd. I've always maintained that the buyers of your product make the ideal logistics partners. There is an old quote that goes, "because without beer, things do not seem to go as well." Knowing that there are millions of other beer nerds out there just like me, it would be rewarding to be involved in the supply chain process for breweries of any size and location. We simply cannot have beer supply issues on store shelves. Not on my watch. I'll shout out my favorite Kansas City brewery Boulevard Brewing. If you have any issues getting Tank 7 out to the masses, you just let me know. .

"We have the commitment to every customer as if they were our only customer. At the basic level, we are solution finders. There may be opportunities that other large box providers brush aside, that's not our style. If it can be done, we'll find a way to do it for you."

Q: What made you decide to work at Hoplite?

RC: First, my tremendous respect for the founders, Bryan and Rich. I've worked with them both for almost my entire 15 years in logistics. When you share the same training, background and work ethic with your founders, there is a level of trust (see there's that word again) that exists to ensure success. There isn't even a thought of failure on our team, because failing would be to fail each other. There are so many situations and variables that exist in our industry that you need to be able to know the guy or gal next to you has the exact same goals and motivations. With Bryan and Rich, I know that without a doubt. Secondly, the Hoplite team has so much logistics experience from our backgrounds that we've all had a taste of what works and what really doesn't.

The opportunity to build from the ground up a logistics experience that doesn't need a big learning curve is a fantastic opportunity. We've eliminated what we felt were the negative aspects of transportation brokerages, so our customers get a polished final copy of the Hoplite experience.

Q: Why should a customer work with Hoplite?

RC: I think for a lot of the reasons I listed above. If you even accidentally call our number and hit a random extension, you're getting someone on the phone who has at least 10 years experience in this industry. We're a tight knit group who have helped successfully scale some of the largest logistics providers in the nation. Our reach extends from Mexico to Canada and everywhere in between. We have the commitment to every customer as if they were our only customer. At the basic level, we are solution finders. There may be opportunities that other large box providers brush aside, that's not our style. If it can be done, we'll find a way to do it for you. I was born in the "Show Me State," my answer is yes until shown otherwise. In short, a customer should work with Hoplite because we're going to execute. We're going to execute above and beyond the level of industry standards. Perfection is our objective and until we reach it, we'll always be striving for that.

Q: What do you like to do outside of work?

RC: I'm a big fan of outside. I have a 2-year-old dog and a 4 year old daughter, both of whom like to round around like the world will end if they stop. We're always hiking, walking or running somewhere. I'm an avid golfer, distance runner and amateur grill master. In the fall and winter I enjoy hunting, and during the spring and summer months I love fishing. If I'm not outside, you can usually find me watching my Chiefs, Royals or Jayhawks.


Q: How did you get the nickname The Reverend?

RC: So a bit of background, my family grew up very Roman Catholic. Catholic school from kindergarten thru high school. Then I went to public college at KU. I had a buddy after high school that decided to go to a Catholic college. At Catholic colleges, part of your curriculum is completing service hours. My buddy forgot about them until the night before they were due and had to figure out a solution. His roommate found a way to get ordained online to sign the service hours as a "reverend." I heard the story when I was home for Christmas break one year and thought it was so clever and funny. I had him share the website with me so I could become ordained online. Granted this



was almost 20 years ago now, before everyone was becoming ordained online. It was relatively rare back then. Throughout my 20's, people would catch wind that I was an ordained reverend and want to know the story. I'd tell them that I did it in honor of my buddy and people loved the story so much they just started calling me Rev. The name stuck. Since then, my friends who were young way back when, now think it's a cool experience to have a friend preside over their own wedding. I think I am now up to 5 weddings I have officiated as a real life reverend. So, something that started a bit tongue in cheek has actually turned into something really cool and a lot of great memories for myself, friends and family.

Q: Lastly, why will the Detroit Lions beat the Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl LIX?

RC: Probably because you're playing Madden on Xbox. I would agree if you started a franchise in Madden as the Lions and drafted all the Chiefs players you would win that game (laughing). 

MEET THE HOPLITE TEAM





HOPLITE
— **LOGISTICS**