

Case Study



Racine Berkow Associates uses AT&T cargo tracking to deliver priceless client service



About Racine Berkow Associates

For more than 25 years, Racine Berkow Associates (RBA) has provided logistics services for fine art, antiques and museum exhibitions as they are transported to and from locations around the world. From the company's headquarters in Long Island City, New York, RBA works to ensure all projects for its discerning clientele are handled with the utmost care, commitment and confidentiality.

Situation

In a highly competitive market, owner Racine Berkow realized that cargo-tracking technology could provide an extra layer of security for her clients and their valuable collectibles. While some objects require a courier to accompany the shipment, Berkow knew that a courier could not possibly be next to the crates every second of the trip. At the same time, other objects did not require a courier, yet still needed oversight during the journey.

Solution

Berkow consulted with AT&T about AT&T Cargo View with FlightSafe®, a cargo tracking and monitoring solution. She decided to test the solution by attaching the FlightSafe device to one of her client's crates containing an iconic American painting while in transit from Japan to New York City. During the long trip, Berkow and her client monitored the crate's location, viewing the Cargo View dashboard on a desktop and smartphone. Based on a successful trial, Berkow will now offer Cargo View with FlightSafe as a value-added service.

Framing a Global Opportunity

In 1987, there weren't many women working in logistics, especially young women who owned their own businesses. But that didn't stop Racine Berkow from launching her new company, Racine Berkow Associates, to transport and handle fine art for museums, galleries, institutions and collectors.

Berkow was working as the Registrar for New York City's Jewish Museum when she discovered a need for logistics services in this niche market.

"We were doing a major international show, and our museum had never done anything quite like that before," recalled Berkow. "When I reached out to other museum colleagues to get some advice, I realized there was only one company in New York that handled museum logistics."

After a trip to the airport with a broker to supervise the return of an overseas loan, Berkow found the experience to be "fascinating." "I decided to use my art background and specialize in international logistics," she said. "Here I am, many years later, and I'm still one of the few women business owners in logistics!"

With offices in Manhattan for many years, RBA moved to Long Island City in New York's borough of Queens in 2008.

Racine Berkow Associates Facts

Business Needs

Reliable cargo tracking and environmental monitoring to further enhance client service

Networking Solution

AT&T Cargo View with FlightSafe, including the Cargo View dashboard and FlightSafe devices, provides comprehensive location and environment information

Business Value

Value-added service offers clients peace of mind; differentiates RBA brand in a competitive market; provides cost-effective alternative for select shipments

Industry Focus

Fine art logistics service provider

Size

10 employees

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“Our business was growing, and we needed more space,” explained Berkow. “At that time, I could rent an entire building in Long Island City for the cost of a Manhattan office, so the timing was right.” RBA now occupies three sites and has expanded to offer a full range of services – crating, trucks, warehousing, and a team of art handlers.

Formulating Value for the Priceless

For her continued success, Berkow has devised a formula to keep challenges contained and operations running smoothly. “Our business approach can be summed up in four words: care, commitment, confidentiality and cost. We’re cost competitive, but we won’t cut corners.”

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– Racine Berkow, Owner, Racine Berkow Associates

Berkow also completely understands how to handle her clients’ valuable collectibles. For example, RBA’s museum clients want assurance that each object is treated as if it’s the most important one in the collection. “Although we treat each object for every client with care, we are especially sensitive to the high standards of our museum clients.”

Berkow also explains that such caring goes far beyond monetary value. “Everyone at RBA is passionate about art. We truly care about the survival of the objects we handle for future generations.”

RBA’s commitment to its clients’ privacy is equally strong. Each RBA employee signs a non-disclosure agreement, and Berkow rigorously enforces it. “Throughout the years, we have worked hard to build strong relationships with our clients,” said Berkow. “Their trust is everything – something we guard and protect.”

Improving Care Through Technology

“I was interested in how technology could help us better care for objects during transport,” said Berkow. “While an art handler or museum representative typically accompanies very high value shipments as they travel from destination to destination, it’s impossible to be with the cargo every second of the trip. Also, not all clients require a courier to travel along.”

Another concern is temperature and humidity. “Understanding and managing travel conditions and how the crate is handled – if it’s roughly treated or loaded incorrectly, we need to know where and when the incident took place,” said Berkow. “I wanted to provide an extra layer of service to reassure our clients about the safety of their objects during transport.”

While attending a logistics conference, Berkow met with AT&T to learn more about its cargo tracking application, AT&T Cargo View with FlightSafe. She discovered that a FlightSafe device could be packed in an RBA crate along with the object, providing position information and sensor data to monitor the crate’s location and environmental conditions from location to location. Using the Cargo View dashboard

application on a desktop or smartphone, RBA and its client could view and monitor the object’s entire journey across the globe.

Virtual Courier Goes Along for the Ride

Excited about the possibilities, Berkow decided to conduct a one-way trial of FlightSafe as a “virtual courier.” As part of a layered security approach, the device would accompany a valuable work of art that was part of a major exhibition in Asia, traveling back to New York City. “The last venue for this exhibition was Japan,” said Berkow. “I traveled there to insert the FlightSafe device in the crate while our RBA operations manager and client remained in New York. All of us decided to follow the trip using the Cargo View dashboard.”

Before leaving, AT&T trained Berkow on how to activate and use the FlightSafe device. “It was simple and very easy to use,” said Berkow.

Combined with other security measures already in place, RBA used the Cargo View portal while the client was provided access to a tracking portal number. “Cargo View with FlightSafe worked as planned throughout the trial, and the battery life of the FlightSafe device stayed strong during the more than 14-hour transit,” said Berkow. “Most importantly, our client loved the idea of being able to monitor the artwork at anytime and the peace of mind it offered.”

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The temperature of each environment in which the crate was exposed was also monitored, confirming “no extremes” on either end of the spectrum. Although the FlightSafe shock monitoring feature was not part of the trial, Berkow looks forward to using that in the future. “If there is a breach where the crate is mishandled, the FlightSafe device will send an alarm to advise us when and where it happened,” explained Berkow. “We also believe the FlightSafe device can help prevent people from mishandling our cargo by just knowing the device is in or on the crate.”

Providing Peace of Mind

With the trial successfully completed, Berkow now plans to include AT&T Cargo View with FlightSafe as part of her services portfolio. The new cargo tracking application will provide a value-added service for RBA’s loyal client base and further differentiate the RBA brand in its competitive market.

Berkow emphasizes that Cargo View with FlightSafe may not necessarily take the place of a courier accompanying a shipment; however, it can supplement the courier and provide an even more sophisticated level of service. And for shipments where couriers are not required, Cargo View with FlightSafe can offer clients a cost-effective alternative, and even give them the ability to monitor their own shipments.

"In our business, it's hard to put a price on 'knowing' where a valuable shipment is at any given minute and what conditions it is being exposed to," said Berkow.

"I've been handling fine art and museum pieces now for almost 30 years, but I never take our track record for granted," said Berkow, who has handled high profile shipments worth hundreds of millions of dollars. "If I ever do, and stop paying attention to all the intricate details that comprise a successful shipment, I shouldn't be in this business anymore."

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