

Tom Vincent - Vice President, Prime Air Cargo



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Tom Vincent, Vice President of Prime Air Cargo, shares insights into the company's journey as a global logistics leader headquartered in Puerto Rico, the challenges and opportunities in serving the life sciences sector, and the strategic innovations driving its success. Vincent discusses how Prime Air Cargo has adapted to evolving industry demands, leveraged cutting-edge technologies, and contributed to Puerto Rico's position as a critical hub for pharmaceutical manufacturing and distribution worldwide.

Could you provide an overview of Prime Air Cargo and its global logistics operations?

What significant developments have occurred over the past 10 years?

Prime Air Corp was co-founded in 2001 by my wife, Iris Vincent, and myself. Today, we are in the midst of a succession plan involving our two sons, Gabriel and Steven, who serve as Operations Director and Business Development Director, respectively. Over the past two decades, Prime Air Corp has established itself as a global logistics leader and is notably the first and only global logistics company headquartered in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico serves as the ideal location for our headquarters due to its strategic importance. As the largest exporter of pharmaceuticals and medical devices in the United States, the island is often referred to as the "medicine cabinet of the world." In fact, Puerto Rico exports more life sciences products than any individual U.S. state, with export volumes exceeding even those of Indiana by

over 50%. This positioning underscores Puerto Rico's critical role as a hub for global pharma and medical device logistics.

Prime Air Corp offers comprehensive global freight forwarding services. Air freight constitutes 85% of our operations, with ocean freight comprising 14% and ground freight 1%. Our network spans four key regions: Europe, North America, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America, with 86 global partners facilitating seamless shipments to and from virtually any destination worldwide.

We take pride in our certifications and accreditations, which demonstrate our commitment to quality, security, and sustainability. These include IATA CEIV Pharma, ISO 9001, EcoVadis for sustainability, and Transport Asset Protection Association certification for the highest standards in transportation security. Additionally, we are a TSA-certified cargo screening facility, a U.S. Customs-bonded facility, and maintain a unique partnership with U.S. Customs, allowing after-hours and weekend clearances when necessary.

Our operations go beyond Puerto Rico. Approximately 40% of our business involves shipments that do not touch Puerto Rico, managed by our team of over 56 logistics professionals. These operations span markets such as Europe-to-China, the U.S.-to-China, and intra-Europe, all coordinated through our headquarters.

While our core focus is on pharmaceuticals and medical devices, we also handle commercial goods and perishables. However, life sciences remain our primary vertical, accounting for the majority of our global operations. Our expertise and strategic location make Prime Air Corp a critical partner for clients seeking efficient and secure logistics solutions in a competitive global market.

How do you anticipate the company's new direction, with the separation of the healthcare business from other areas, will impact its future growth?

The shift in our direction has been underway for some time now. Prime Air Corp has operated as Prime Air Corp Health for 21 years, maintaining a strong focus on the healthcare and life sciences sectors. Previously, we had a relationship with another company where we utilized some of their services, such as their operating system. Over time, it became clear that both companies needed to pursue independent paths. This decision was mutual, and while they continued in their direction, we doubled down on our specialization in healthcare. By concentrating our efforts on the healthcare sector, we are positioning ourselves for sustainable growth and reinforcing our leadership in the logistics of life sciences.

How have the demands of the pharmaceutical sector changed for its logistical partners in recent years, and how has Prime Air Cargo adapted to meet these evolving needs?

The pharmaceutical sector has become increasingly competitive, not only in terms of cost but also in the demand for efficiency and meticulous handling. Handling pharmaceutical products or medical devices requires precision, care, and a sense of responsibility. At Prime Air Corp, we instill a patient-centric approach in every member of our team. We remind our employees that the products we handle could end up saving the life of one of their own family members. This mindset ensures that every shipment, whether it is a medical device or a pharmaceutical product, is treated with the utmost care and urgency. By emphasizing this level of dedication and attention, we align ourselves with the values and expectations of our healthcare clients, ensuring we exceed their needs.

How did Prime Air Cargo contribute to the COVID-19 pandemic response in the region, and which logistical strengths were accelerated as a result of the pandemic?

COVID certainly brought unprecedented challenges, particularly in the logistics sector. With 85% of our business being air freight, we faced a global situation where most airlines were grounded. Despite this, not only did we sustain operations, but we also grew our business during this period. The key was innovation—thinking outside the box and finding creative solutions.

One standout example was the use of chartered flights to keep supply chains moving. For instance, we arranged a passenger aircraft—without passengers—and loaded it entirely with cargo for a shipment from Thailand to Puerto Rico. This particular shipment was critical for one of our clients' manufacturing lines.

These creative solutions demonstrated our ability to adapt under pressure. By turning challenges into opportunities, we ensured the continuity of essential healthcare supply chains. The experience also accelerated our agility and problem-solving capabilities, further strengthening our reputation as a trusted logistics partner. At Prime Air Corp, we believe there are no impossibilities—only challenges to overcome.

How has Prime Air Cargo progressed in implementing new technologies, and what innovations have had the most impact on your operations?

We are currently in the process of transitioning to the latest version of CargoWise, which brings several advanced features to our operations. This includes barcode scanning and live proof of delivery capabilities. While we already had a live proof of delivery system, the upgrade will allow our drivers to upload delivery information directly from the point of delivery. This data is instantly integrated into our system, enabling customers to view shipment updates in real time. Locally in Puerto Rico, we also have a live tracking system for all vehicles making deliveries, allowing us to monitor their movements in real time and ensure efficiency.

In terms of artificial intelligence, we are utilizing business intelligence tools that help us gather and analyze data. This allows us to create dashboards to track activity and break down the different components of a transaction. For example, we can segment transit times at each milestone, from the shipper to the airport, and from the airport to the final delivery. These metrics allow us to establish objectives and ensure compliance with our KPIs, which are central to our operations.

Additionally, we have developed one of the most advanced temperature-controlled facilities at the airport. These facilities meet qualified pharmaceutical standards and can maintain temperatures ranging from 2-8°C and 15-25°C, ensuring proper handling of pharmaceutical shipments in and out of Puerto Rico.

How is the current political and economic climate in Puerto Rico and the United States affecting the logistics sector, particularly within the life sciences industry?

There are many positive developments happening in Puerto Rico, particularly in the life sciences industry. One significant initiative we are part of is the Puerto Rico Life Sciences Logistics Community, which was originally organized by the Department of Economic Development. This group brings together professionals from across the logistics ecosystem, including manufacturers, freight forwarders, airlines, ground handlers, trucking companies, and warehousing providers. The goal is to create a robust ecosystem that ensures the same high-quality standards in logistics as those maintained within manufacturing facilities.

This initiative strengthens Puerto Rico's positioning as a leader in life sciences logistics. By aligning capabilities across the supply chain—such as air cargo and ground transportation—we provide a comprehensive and reliable logistics framework. This gives Puerto Rico a significant advantage

when attracting new pharmaceutical companies. For instance, when organizations like Invest Puerto Rico promote the island to potential investors, they can highlight our dedicated life sciences air cargo community as a unique asset.

This framework is modeled after successful pharma cargo hubs in places like Brussels and Amsterdam and was initiated about three years ago with leadership from key figures in economic development. To ensure its sustainability, the initiative has since transitioned to a private entity, complete with a board of directors and an executive committee. This structure ensures continuity and independence from changes in government, reinforcing Puerto Rico's ability to attract and support life sciences businesses with world-class logistics standards.

Puerto Rico has been a key hub for pharmaceutical manufacturing for many years, yet it seems to lack the global recognition it deserves. Why do you think this is, and what actions do you believe should be taken to raise Puerto Rico's profile in the global market?

There are several components to this issue. COVID highlighted significant challenges in global supply chains, particularly the drawbacks of relying on manufacturing processes and APIs sourced from across the world. During a crisis, having critical components located far from where the final products are manufactured can create major disruptions. This realization has driven the current focus on reshoring and nearshoring, bringing production closer to home, where the final product is assembled. Puerto Rico is an ideal location for this reshoring and onshoring trend due to its proven capabilities.

Our universities produce some of the best engineers in the world. This is evident in organizations like NASA and leading pharmaceutical and medical device companies, where Puerto Rican engineers hold key positions and are climbing the ranks. We also have a highly skilled workforce with deep expertise in the intricacies of pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturing. Puerto Rico has nearly all the pieces of the puzzle to serve as the perfect home for major pharmaceutical, biopharmaceutical, and medical device companies.

To raise Puerto Rico's global profile, we need to continue emphasizing these strengths, promoting our exceptional talent pool, and leveraging our strategic location as part of the United States. Consistent advocacy, highlighting success stories, and building stronger public-private partnerships will also be key.

Puerto Rico has a wealth of talent, but many individuals migrate to the mainland for opportunities. How does Prime Air Cargo attract and retain talent within Puerto Rico?

At Prime Air Cargo, we are very selective in our hiring process because we want the best talent in the industry. The package of benefits, compensation, and growth opportunities we offer is hard to match elsewhere, which is why we are successful in both recruiting and retaining top talent. Retention is just as critical as recruitment because a revolving door wastes resources on training only for employees to leave for other industries.

We create an environment that fosters professional growth and development, giving employees a sense of purpose and belonging. By investing in our people and ensuring they have the tools and opportunities to succeed, we are able to build a loyal and dedicated workforce.

On a more personal note, you mentioned founding the company with your wife. What inspired you to enter the logistics industry, and what motivated you to pursue a career in this field?

I started in the logistics industry at a very young age, and I now have more than 45 years of experience in the field. My first exposure to logistics was through a moving company while I was in college. At the time, Puerto Rico still had military bases, and I coordinated the transport of household goods for military personnel being transferred out.

From there, I moved into the manufacturing sector, working in the transportation department. This led to opportunities with airlines, including American Airlines Cargo, where I worked for about eight years in Puerto Rico. Later, I became the Country Manager for Emery Worldwide. In 1989, my wife and I founded our first company, Best Ways Air Cargo, which became one of the major players in Puerto Rico's air cargo industry. After selling that company in 1999, we founded Prime Air Corp in 2001.

Our motivation has always been to create something that reflects our passion for logistics while contributing to Puerto Rico's growth. Founding these companies gave us the opportunity to build a legacy, support the island's economic development, and provide reliable logistics solutions for our clients.

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