

The logistics companies of Basel

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The port and the customs station gave rise to a logistics industry whose companies became international leaders. Danzas is the oldest example. The company traces its origins to 1815, when a forwarding business was established in Saint-Louis on the French side of the border, and later moved its headquarters to Basel. Danzas grew into one of the largest European forwarders before Deutsche Post acquired it at the end of the 1990s and integrated it into its logistics division, where the name was eventually replaced by the DHL brand.¹

Panalpina followed a similar trajectory. Founded in Basel in 1935 through the combination of earlier forwarding businesses, it specialised in air freight and project logistics, notably for the energy industry. Listed on the Swiss stock exchange from 2005, Panalpina remained headquartered in Basel until it was taken over by the Danish group DSV in 2019 after a contested bidding process, which led to the combined company being named DSV Panalpina for a period.² Panalpina had settled proceedings with US authorities in 2010 concerning payments made on behalf of customers in several countries, a matter documented in official US sources and in the company's own disclosures.³

Kuehne+Nagel, founded in Bremen in 1890, moved its legal seat to Switzerland and is today headquartered in Schindellegi in the canton of Schwyz. It is mentioned here because its development illustrates how Swiss logistics groups combine a German or international heritage with a Swiss corporate base, the same pattern that brought several forwarding businesses to Basel.⁴ Basel remains home to numerous smaller forwarders, customs brokers and specialised logistics firms that serve the chemical and pharmaceutical industry and the cross-border trade of the region.

The Rhine shipping and terminal business in Basel is today carried out largely by subsidiaries of international groups and by specialised operators. Container terminals, tank storage companies and bulk handlers operate on

land leased from the Swiss Rhine Ports. The ownership of these operators has changed several times through mergers and acquisitions, a process that reflects the consolidation of European logistics and that raises questions of competition when only a few operators remain in a given market.⁵

1 Notes

1. On the history of Danzas, founded in 1815 in Saint-Louis by Marie Mathias Nathanael Danzas, its headquarters in Basel, its acquisition by Deutsche Post in 1998/1999 and its integration into DHL (brand discontinued around 2003), see HLS, article "Danzas", and the publications of Deutsche Post DHL. Dates to be verified. ↩
2. On the foundation of Panalpina in Basel in 1935, its listing on the SIX Swiss Exchange in 2005 and its acquisition by DSV in 2019, see HLS, article "Panalpina", the annual reports of Panalpina and the offer documents published in 2019. Dates to be verified. ↩
3. On the settlement of Panalpina with the US Department of Justice and the Securities and Exchange Commission in November 2010 under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, see the press releases of the DOJ and SEC of 4 November 2010 and Panalpina's annual report for 2010. To be verified. ↩
4. On the history of Kuehne+Nagel, founded in Bremen in 1890 and with its headquarters in Schindellegi (SZ), see the company's publications and HLS, article "Kühne + Nagel". To be verified. ↩
5. On the operators of the terminals in the Swiss Rhine ports and the consolidation of the sector, see the annual reports of the Swiss Rhine Ports and the decisions of the Swiss Competition Commission (COMCO) on mergers in the logistics sector. To be verified. ↩

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