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Supply Chain Commentary: 10 Ways to Enhance Visibility

April 16, 2018 | Jon Slangerup

Tags: Technology (<http://www.inboundlogistics.com/cms/tags/articles/Technology/>), Big Data (<http://www.inboundlogistics.com/cms/tags/articles/BigData/>), Visibility (<http://www.inboundlogistics.com/cms/tags/articles/visibility/>)

Seeing what's happening throughout the supply chain—and being able to make changes when things don't go as planned—is essential in today's always-on, omnichannel shipping environment. But even though businesses have more tools, providers, and resources than ever for supply chain management, two-thirds still report they don't have end-to-end visibility, according to the Business Continuity Institute.

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Here's how businesses can gain the insight and control they need as they move their goods around the globe.

- 1. Time for technology.** A robust technology platform is the linchpin of the modern supply chain. If you're still circulating spreadsheets or relying on paper files for any part of your process, migrating to a centralized platform can help you significantly reduce siloed information, data errors, and back-and-forth between your team.
- 2. Every carrier, one platform.** Working with multiple carriers is standard business practice today, but often requires shippers to log into each provider's platform for shipping status. Look for a tool that pulls in data for every shipper, so you don't have to jump from portal to portal.

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Leveraging Collaborative Logistics for Increased Visibility

3. **Standardize your business requirements.** Keeping track of who needs what (and when) can be a full-time job for large businesses with many points of sale. Create a standard checklist of documentation, delivery requirements, and other rules for each buyer or location, allowing you to see easily if something's missing.
4. **Manage by exception.** Supply chain visibility isn't about seeing the 999 shipments that arrived on time—it's about spotting the one that didn't. A technology platform built around your business rules can provide intelligent alerts and escalations to head off supply chain issues quickly and make you and your team more efficient.
5. **Get your numbers right.** Accurate data can be hard to come by in the logistics industry. To gain a clearer picture of operations, establish a process for scrubbing freight invoices, delivery milestones, and other supply chain information as efficiently as possible.
6. **Don't forget purchase orders.** As more businesses keep inventory levels at a minimum, keeping an eye on production status is essential to meet delivery timelines and customer expectations. The right supply chain management tool can provide valuable insight into lead times, vendor performance, and more.
7. **Head to the cloud.** A web-based platform enables your factories, suppliers, carriers, employers, and other stakeholders to get up-to-the-minute information from any device. Look for systems with user-based permissions to make sure sensitive details stay secure.
8. **Take advantage of new customs tools.** The new Automated Commercial Environment (ACE) is designed to streamline the import process by automating the documentation required by U.S. Customs and Border Protection and dozens of other government agencies. By consolidating every filing in one spot, ACE also gives shippers new visibility into their customs program. Use it to see ports where you've had a history of exams, shipments that required extra screening, and other data that can guide smart supply chain decisions.
9. **Measure what matters.** Many shippers have a treasure trove of logistics data at their fingertips, but lack the bandwidth to turn it into business insights. A supply chain platform with custom reporting tools lets you establish the KPIs that are meaningful to your business. For example, if an ocean carrier says it takes 25 days to travel from South China Sea but your last 10 shipments took 30 days, you can adjust your routes accordingly.
10. **All under one roof.** For complex global supply chains, establishing a point of contact responsible for overseeing all technology, logistics, and processes can have a huge impact on visibility. Consider a supply chain partner with the expertise and industry relationships to spot inefficiencies, eliminate duplicated efforts, and ensure everyone is marching toward the same goal.

Jon Slangerup is the chairman and CEO of American Global Logistics and the former CEO of the Port of Long Beach. As a 4PL, American Global Logistics oversees all logistics activity for its customers with a technology platform that provides visibility for each shipment's movement through the supply chain.

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