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Navigating the Storm A Shipper's Guide to Choosing the Right Logistics Partner

FIVE KEY FACTORS TO ENSURE SUCCESS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Seamless Integration

Hands-Off Experience

Leveraging AI

Empowering Sustainability

Commitment to People

Shippers are overloaded with uncertainty. The pandemic sparked fervent demand for consumer goods while disrupting supply chains and creating bottlenecks. Many companies over-ordered when production returned, anticipating high demand would continue. Inventories surged, but demand tapered, creating a bullwhip effect.

Market uncertainties create opportunities, however. Shippers can innovate and enter strategic partnerships with logistics providers to make their supply chains more resilient, responsive, and efficient to weather any storm ahead.

Shippers benefit from aligning with top logistics providers that leverage AI-powered systems to streamline complex, data-heavy industries. They also benefit from human expertise in problem-solving.

This guide is a helpful assist in choosing a logistics partner by identifying 5 critical success factors.



1 | SEAMLESS INTEGRATION

Logistics is a fast-paced and data-intensive business. If a logistics provider has shortcomings or difficulties integrating systems and sharing data, it will create a chokehold on visibility and automation.

Logistics partners that can accommodate unique data integration needs offer cost-saving advantages by eliminating manual touchpoints, freeing time for your staff to focus on strategic initiatives.

The most common methods for sharing data between your systems and logistics providers are electronic data interchange (EDI) and application programming interfaces (APIs). Sometimes, you may need a custom integration and may require a solution that uses SQL tables or file transfer protocol (FTP) to exchange documents, for example.

Having reliable connections to exchange orders, shipment tracking data, invoices, and other electronic communications is just the beginning. **Logistics partners can save additional time and money by integrating with your systems to provide:**

ONE-STOP SHOPPING

A logistics partner with diverse services will save time by simplifying communications for complex transactions. For instance, a logistics partner that manages multiple modes of transportation, warehousing, and fulfillment only needs to integrate with your ERP system to receive orders, share updates, and more.

STRATEGIC REVIEWS

A logistics partner that integrates with your supply chain can analyze data across your network, such as costs associated with different carriers, to help achieve higher volumes, better service, lower costs, and reduced transit times.

CUSTOM WORKFLOWS

You may need a logistics partner to use general ledger (GL) codes for shipments or create reports to feed structured data into your accounting or ERP systems.

FREIGHT BILL AUDITING

Do you have a uniform way to audit the invoices you receive from carriers? An added benefit of a logistics partner that can integrate with your systems is to check pricing and other invoice details and convert data to your preferred metrics, such as cost-per-pound.



2 | HANDS-OFF EXPERIENCE

Another way a logistics partner adds value is by offering a hands-off approach to managing your entire supply chain by coordinating all modes of transportation, warehousing, and fulfillment.

A partner that seamlessly connects with your supply chain can manage ocean container shipments from China, for example, through domestic ports and warehouses and fulfill shipments of raw or finished goods via truckload, LTL, and parcel carriers. Those shipments can go directly to production lines, retail locations, or consumers.

When a shipper sends a logistics partner an electronic order for an overseas shipment, the partner coordinates the pickup and transportation of a container via an ocean carrier to a domestic port.

If the container comes from China, the port will typically be on the west coast. The logistics partner tracks the container across the water and gives an accurate ETA. When the container hits the port, the partner arranges drayage to a warehouse, awaiting orders from your ERP to manage fulfillment to the end customer.

Integrating all systems in your supply chain allows the logistics partner to monitor for exceptions and solve problems proactively. For instance, if a container is behind schedule, the partner will proactively communicate the status and arrange for the container to be shipped inland via truckload to meet your service expectations rather than use rail intermodal.



3 | LEVERAGING AI

Logistics companies of all sizes are tapping into the power of AI to manage the firehose of data. AI shines brightest in systems that take in varying data, structure it, and deliver predictable and accurate analytics.

Below are the primary areas where shippers can benefit from choosing a logistics partner that harnesses the power of AI.

PREDICTIVE ETAs

Shippers no longer need to rely on averages for overseas shipment transit times. A logistics partner can feed various data points into a system that provides accurate ETAs for international and domestic shipments. The ETAs account for weather, port performance, and other details to provide realistic delivery dates.

AVOIDING DETENTION FEES

The same AI systems that predict ETAs can also actively track demurrage and detention at ports or shipping and receiving locations. With predictive insights, a logistics partner can help shippers avoid fees and get better carrier rates.

CAPACITY MANAGEMENT

A logistics partner can predict carrier lane preferences and obtain the best rates using AI to collect data from load boards, emails, and other data sources. The partner can send an auto-tender to carriers that prefer the lane to accept or decline quickly.

CYBERSECURITY

No shipper wants to tell customers it fell victim to a cyberattack. A logistics partner that uses AI can identify threats to its servers and workstations to act as a first line of defense.

SOFTWARE CODING

Shippers benefit from having a logistics partner that can quickly develop custom solutions and address system issues. AI tools can suggest software code that helps logistics partners solve problems for customers and speed development.



4 | EMPOWERING SUSTAINABILITY

Manufacturers and retailers, among other businesses, are setting ambitious goals to decarbonate their supply chains and document the progress. A top logistics partner can help create a sustainable supply chain through careful planning, collaboration, and ongoing monitoring.

Here are a few ways that a top-performing logistics partner can assist:

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

What a logistics partner is doing internally to reduce waste and inefficiency can significantly impact your efforts. For instance, a partner could send you 100% of its invoices electronically and receive invoices from carriers electronically.

SELECTING ECO-FRIENDLY CARRIERS

A logistics provider can suggest and execute plans to move loads from higher to lower emissions carriers. The SmartWay program from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has valuable data on carriers to assist with these efforts.

CONSOLIDATING SHIPMENTS

A logistics provider with planning tools can proactively identify opportunities to consolidate LTL shipments into fuller LTL or truckload shipments to reduce truck miles. Generally, this strategy works for shipments that share delivery dates within a three-day window.

REVIEWING PERFORMANCE

A logistics partner can provide reporting and dashboards highlighting your progress, challenges, and future sustainability goals.

Implementing a sustainable supply chain is an ongoing process that requires commitment, collaboration, and adaptability. Aligning your efforts with suitable transportation and logistics partners is a crucial part of that endeavor.

5 | COMMITMENT TO PEOPLE

Transportation and logistics are prone to sudden disruptions. How a logistics partner responds is a defining characteristic. They should be at their best in these moments. When evaluating a partner, one thing is sure: their people, not just technology, determine how quickly and effectively they solve problems.

Many logistics providers are heavily invested in technology to automate routine tasks. Some focus digital efforts on reducing staff, which limits their ability to solve customer problems during crucial moments. Proactive, high-touch solutions require a solid commitment only people can deliver.

Here are a few critical people-focused attributes of a logistics partner that can meet your strategic needs:

COMMUNICATION

Most routine communications, like shipment tracking, can be automated. Yet many circumstances require a human touch point. A key metric for evaluating a logistics provider is how quickly someone answers the phone (in a few seconds) or responds to an email (in a few minutes). In critical situations, a logistics partner should contact you first and have a solution ready.

COLLABORATION

A logistics partner should do more than manage your contract and spot market freight. For instance, a partner adds value by closely monitoring market capacity and advising of changes affecting your budgets or ability to service different areas. A partner also adds value by proactively identifying and executing cost-saving opportunities, such as consolidating LTL shipments.

PROBLEM SOLVERS

Transportation doesn't always go as planned. Technology is great at identifying problems, but often times it takes people to dive in and solve problems.



GAIN THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Transportation and logistics strategies are discussed frequently in the C-suite of shippers. Leaders know they risk losing market share to competitors with more agile and efficient supply chains.

At any time, and especially during periods of market uncertainty, shippers can raise their bulwarks by enhancing operational efficiency and reducing supply chain risk. Choose a top-performing logistics partner that offers seamless integrations, AI-powered solutions, customized services, and a team of experts to chart your course through uncharted waters by seamlessly planning and executing the best strategies.



CHECKING ALL THE BOXES

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