

## What Will it Take to Achieve True Supply Chain Visibility?

*Supply chain is in the midst of yet another evolution. All companies recognize the need for end-to-end visibility, yet very few, if any, have achieved it. At present, we are trying to link disparate systems with varying degrees of success... and failure. Slowly, but surely, we are progressing toward "supply chain social networks" that will one day integrate people, processes and information. The question is, how long will it take and what will it finally look like?*

Everybody is talking about the need for improved supply chain visibility, but is it really possible? After all, many companies have yet to effectively solve visibility issues within their own organizations, let alone with multiple tiers of suppliers and third-party logistics providers. Many of us, myself included, believe the answer will eventually be found in supply chain social networks. The Internet is not only the most cost effective vehicle for driving supply chain integration, it is also a "technology" that everyone understands.

Still, the biggest challenge is integration. How can disparate systems, including ERP, WMS, SCM, and all the rest, "talk" each other without dropping critical information?

Ken Lyon, Managing Director Virtual Partners Ltd., weighed in on a discussion we started at the Third Party Logistics Group on LinkedIn. Ken wrote, "One of the biggest challenges facing anybody seeking information across a multi-party, multi-tier supply chain, is maintaining context. In other words, being able to identify items, orders, consignments and parties precisely. This is harder than it seems, as each organisation references items in their own context."

"As more parties and additional systems are included in the mix," Ken continued, "the problem increases. This is further compounded by ERP implementations which enforce specific processes, consequently defining rigid EDI interfaces. Attempting to impose common references across the entire chain is usually impossible and why there are very few examples of true end-to-end visibility."

Steven Christensen, President of Babbleware Inc., agreed with Ken. "Distortion," Steven wrote, "occurs when the existing business systems, which I refer to as Enterprise 1.0 systems, fall out of tune with the business requirements. While already in place and consolidating financials with a solid command and control, these E1.0 systems rapidly loose resonance with the actual business: new customers, new competitors, ever-increasing data required, updated processes, new technology, compliance, regulation, M&A, etc."

Steven went on to say, "By failing to remain concurrent with this changing environment the ability to properly tune operations within a company, let alone outside of a company (read collaboration), will forever be just out of tune. As Ken Lyon commented, the distortion a network of out of tune signals creates is deafening."

Steven also believes that Enterprise 2.0 could very well be the solution, although he says it does not necessarily require social tools that literally track conversations across a network. Babbleware, whose tagline is, "Achieving Change Without Changing Systems," offers enterprise add-on solutions. Unlike other methods that require communication between systems, such middleware, translators and software integration, Babbleware, which is 100% browser-based, listens to systems and applications, and works with them to give employees, vendors, and customers immediate, cost effective, and highly scalable web access according to your established security practices and policies.

Jeannie Christensen, Inbound Marketing Manager at Coupa Software, recently chimed in our LinkedIn discussion with this, "There are now systems out there in the Cloud that do all of the inline reporting and visibility directly into the platform, instead of costly or custom integrations between many different systems -- e-procurement, ERP, data warehouse, contracts, etc. -- In the cloud you can leverage things like multi-tenancy and gathering benchmarks across customers on the same platform. In the cloud you can build platforms that can report in real time against the rich data being captured by your eprocurement tool and even more importantly allow you to be more proactive in being notified when certain analytic thresholds are hit."

In my opinion, the future of supply chain visibility will be sophisticated, yet user-friendly, social supply chain networks that will seamlessly blend human interaction with robust systems that can "talk" to one another, most likely in an open and standardized cloud interface.

What do you think the future hold? Tell us what you think here at Logipi or join our discussion at LinkedIn.

[The Future Supply Chain Social Networks. Visibility through data interfaces..](#)

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