

The right tools in trying supply chain times

 By [Andrew Dawson](#)

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The Covid-19 pandemic has seen companies working hard to optimise their supply chain, adapting to these unprecedented challenges by adopting digitisation, mechanisation, and automation to optimise operations and efficiencies.



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The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry and its supply chain backbone in particular has had to evolve quickly to meet consumer demand whilst ensuring that stock levels remain optimal and accurate.

The challenge is how do you continue to adapt to this new normal whilst providing some form of human interaction that forms an integral part of your business and sales drive?

Call centres, for one, remain the first point of contact for both partners and consumers which meant that organisations had to quickly provide some form of contact despite lockdown restrictions.

Conversely, workers such as call centre agents and salespeople have had to - while working remotely - provide services that ensure optimum interaction and service delivery despite not having access to a physical office infrastructure.

Utilising the power of digital

Fortunately, there are mobile solutions available that provide the requisite functionality to modify existing business processes, providing the necessary tools for working from home (WFH) while still gaining access to vital information and importantly engage with customers.

And it's these organisations in the FMCG and other supply chains that have harnessed mobility – be it as part of an existing enterprise resource planning (ERP) functionality or a new solution – that have managed to weather the proverbial storm while still providing an adequate human element.

From one central Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) application, for example, call centre agents and sales staff can view and update call cycles, track their daily call schedules and importantly ensure that stock is available both in the warehouse and at the various retail partners. This is all enabled seamlessly from remote locations.

With a mobile solution, users can keep their customers top of mind, capturing pre-orders on-the-go while keeping an eye on real-time stock levels.

It is also these SaaS customer relationship management (CRM) solutions that will see the supply chain industry continue to employ a WFH policy despite the phased unlocking. Those that have managed to keep business ticking regardless of restriction challenges, will continue to build on this successful foundation. This while tailoring it to make operations smarter, adaptive and resilient.

Technology will play an important role in providing the supply chain with information that it needs to meet customer demands in real-time while also readily adapting to an ever-changing and challenging landscape.

Simplicity has also become the name of the game, utilising apps and user-friendly interfaces to readily gain access to information such as generating or downloading an updated pricing catalogue. This in turn will create an integrated and seamless stream throughout the entire channel – be it from retailer, wholesaler and manufacturer or vice versa.

Whilst this is not by any means new technology, it will become an invaluable tool in a time when direct interaction isn't always possible – ensuring that organisations work smarter in spite of restrictions and challenges.

Furthermore, technology such as data analytics will equip the supply chain with the means to harness and manage the health of their organisation. It will provide valuable insights into specific trends in supply and demand as consumers start adjusting to the new normal.

Ultimately, technology will play an important role in providing the supply chain with information that it needs to meet customer demands in real-time while also readily adapting to an ever-changing and challenging landscape.

ABOUT ANDREW DAWSON

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