

Technology innovation driving FMCG supply chain revolution



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technology is transforming the industry, providing new opportunities for efficiency and growth.

The retail sector, in particular, has seen a significant impact from the growth and integration of technology in recent years. The introduction of e-commerce and mobile payments has pushed retailers to find new ways to engage with customers and streamline their operations in an increasingly competitive environment.

No matter how long humanity has existed, change has always been imminent, but technology has introduced an unprecedented pace that is transforming all aspects of our lives in a way few could have ever predicted.

Today, technology is revolutionising the way we live – from how we communicate and work, to how we shop and entertain ourselves. In the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, supply chains have seen unprecedented change. From inventory management to delivery,

According to Brian Mudhokwani, Chief Operations Officer at ISB Optimus, the sector is currently experiencing a massive technological remaking, driven by a multitude of innovations and digital advancements. He says. ...



Brian Mudhokwani

“These changes are transforming the way retailers operate and customers shop, ultimately leading to an enhanced, efficient, and personalised shopping experience.”

“The current transformation in retail is characterised by the widespread adoption of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR) the Internet of Things (IoT), automation and blockchain. These are all enabling retailers to optimise their operations, streamline the supply chain, enhance customer experience, and secure sensitive data.”

For Martin Bailey, Chairman of Industrial Logistic Systems (ILS), when it comes to logistics and FMCG, the biggest change worldwide has probably been the explosion of stock-keeping units, along with increasing customer demand.



Martin Bailey

“Instead of having one or two types of peanut butter or soap for customers to choose from, there are now hundreds of choices and customers expect delivery immediately or at the latest the next day.”

This has had a massive impact on the cost of transport and logistics. “Bridging the gap between online and offline shopping experiences is an ongoing challenge and opportunity that brings the need for digital transformation,” explains Renko Bergh, co-founder of Forte Supply Chain Solutions.



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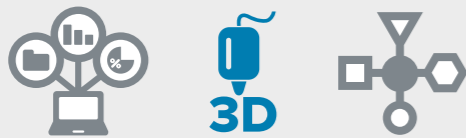
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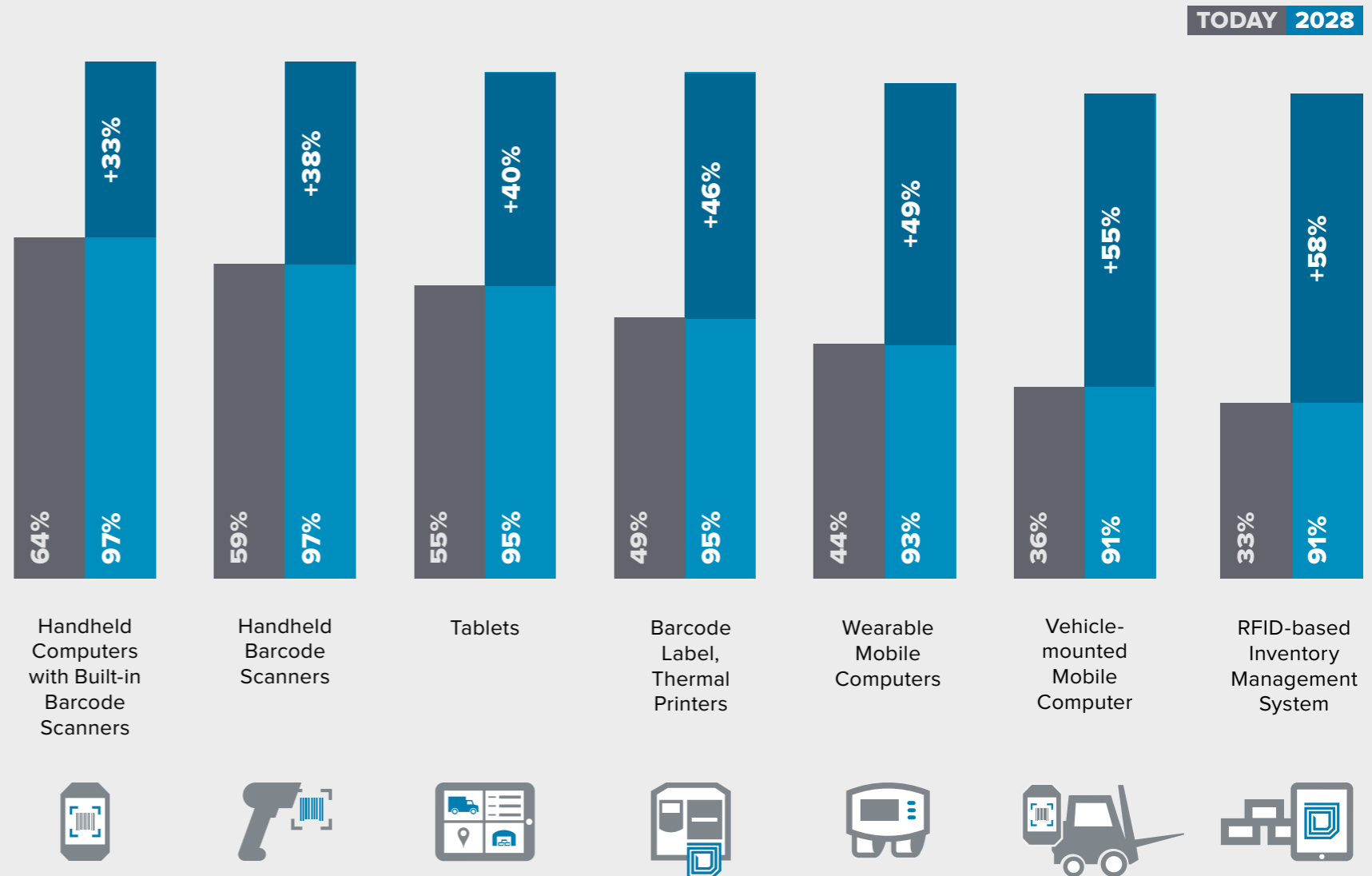
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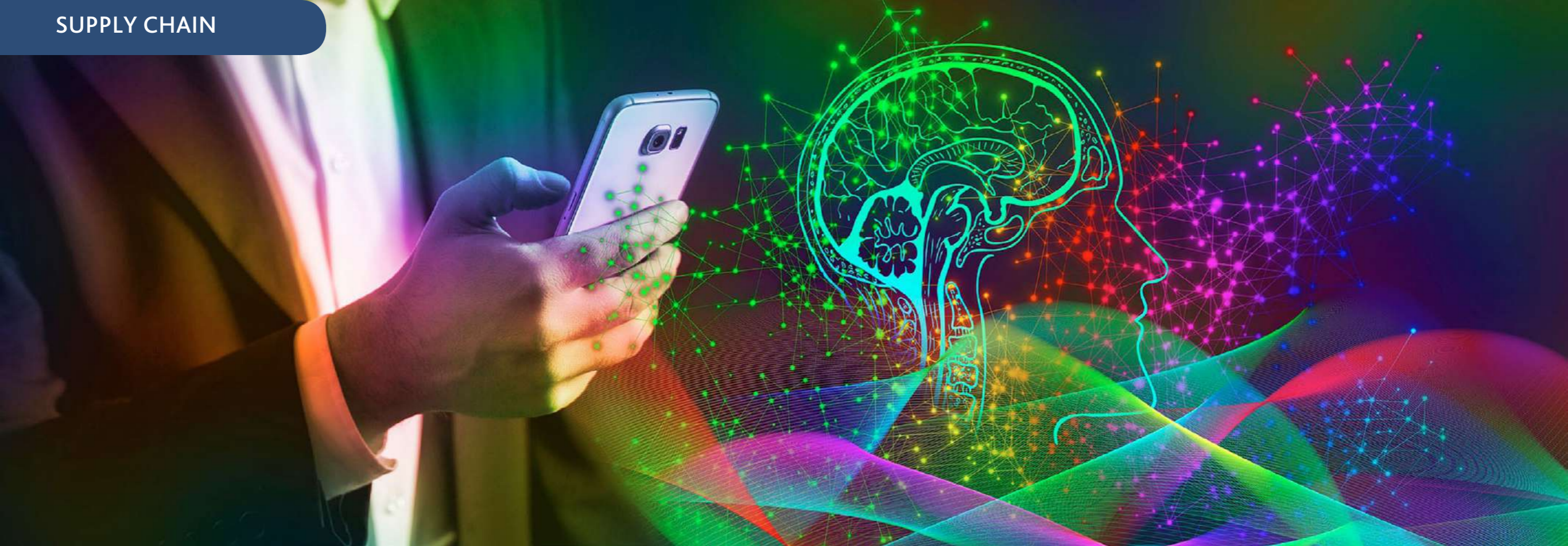


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“The key to this is more than just having systems in place to handle both online and in-store purchases. This requires a unified and connected system that integrates with other technologies. Integrating online and offline transactions, and inventory across all locations and online stores are some of the greatest hurdles that software solution providers seek to overcome when creating the next generation of solutions for retail businesses.”

Bergh warns that technology is not a silver bullet.



Renko Bergh

“Using technology does not guarantee a retailer’s success, it is just one piece of the puzzle. A retailer may use technology to manage merchandise flow, but if it stocks merchandise customers don’t want, its business will suffer.”

“The trick right now is to combine tech know-how with common sense, interpersonal skills, problem-solving savvy and enthusiasm.”

Technology in Transport Accelerating Retailers’ Digital Transformation

According to Henry Smith, Fleets Sales Director at MiX Telematics Africa, technology in transport is enhancing at a steady rate – from the introduction of electric vehicles, (EVs) to the integration of AI.



Henry Smith

“The increasing use of technology has accelerated retailers’ digital transformation directly impacting their success and sustainability. This has encouraged collaboration between retailers and their technology partners.”

He continues, “Telematics technology specifically, which was once considered a ‘nice-to-have’ for many fleet operators, has now become essential, as companies realise the distinct advantages of telematics solutions.”

Cobus Rossouw, Executive Vice-President: Digital & IT at Imperial, a DP World company, stresses the importance of collaboration.



Cobus Rossouw

“It is essential for all stakeholders to work together to reduce transport and logistics costs to get products to end-consumers. However, it has to start with business intent – technology collaboration follows as an enabler.”



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Peter Kerr, Managing Director and founder of Argon Supply Chain Solutions has been working in the SAP and SAP Supply chain solution space for over 20 years. Having been involved in almost all of the SAP Warehouse implementations in South Africa with primary focus on Retail, Peter is able to share some insights on SAP Logistics Solutions and what impact integration has on the solution.

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Cost remains one of the most critical aspects in the South African FMCG supply chain. Logistics costs are already considered amongst the highest in the world. “While automation has become more affordable, generally speaking, around the world, in South Africa the cost thereof is still expensive – simply because of the decline of the Rand,” says Bailey.

“At an exchange rate of €20, paying in Rands for equipment is a completely different equation. On top of that, the skills to implement automation in South Africa are few and far between. We are thus faced with diametrically opposing problems that on the one hand require one to provide a very high level of service, but on the other hand the cost of delivering that is also extremely high.”

In the transport sector, technology is effectively being used to drive down costs. “Transport cost is highly impacted by utilisation,” says Rossouw. “Advanced technology is unlocking immense benefits to reduce turn-around times and decrease empty travelling distances.” He says ...

“Transport operations have become virtually visible through using the immense data provided by tracking devices, which makes it possible to define exact activity schedules, measure against that and act on an exception to minimise waste of all forms.”

Telematics solutions leverage GPS, cameras, mobile devices, and other connectivity infrastructure to track and monitor vehicles.

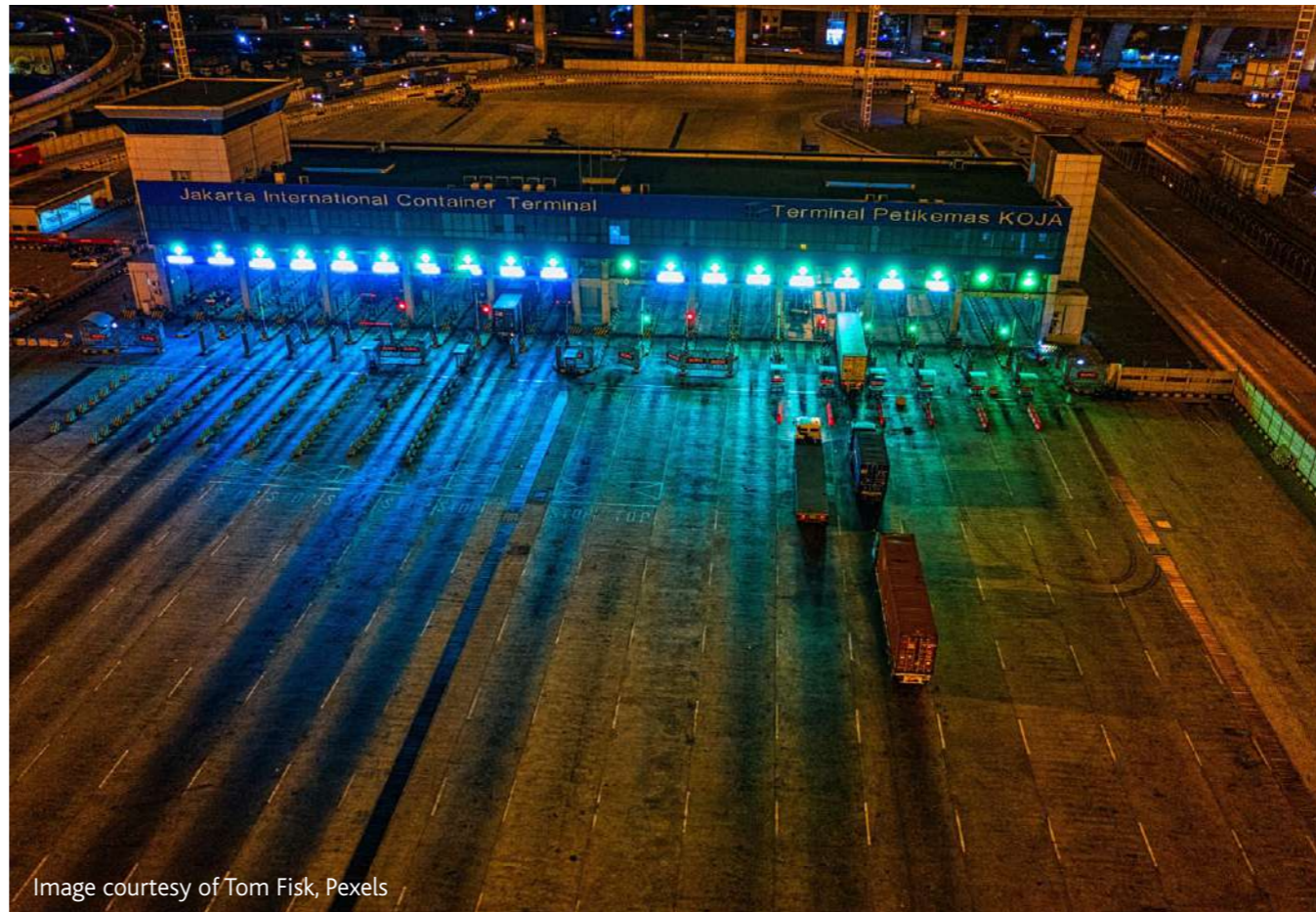


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“It is with this in mind that we aim to deliver software that has been refined with additional industry-defining functionality, along with flexibility and scalable AI software to assist with every-day business needs. It also has to happen on one platform.”

These solutions help supply chain operators improve operations and reduce costs.

“Typical functions offered by fleet management platforms include route planning for efficient deliveries, fuel monitoring and expense management, predictive vehicle maintenance and diagnostics, as well as CO₂ emissions tracking.”



What is important, says Hein Jordt, Chief Executive Officer of Ctrack Africa, is that the solutions need to be easy to use.

Hein Jordt

“Customers’ needs are always changing – making it imperative for the technology to be continually refined without any disruption to the daily functionality.”

Jordt says the last-mile delivery industry has shown tremendous growth in the past three years – with no signs of slowing down ...

“This has seen us making updates to our software to meet the needs of these customers in particular. Fleet managers can now assign jobs to drivers and provide them with details regarding pickup and delivery, such as address or specific instructions when they reach the location safely, via apps.”



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**Transforming FMCG supply chain efficiency:
The emergence of super-apps**

Apps have become the latest trend, explains Bergh. "It is all about super apps. These combine a range

of services, such as e-commerce, messaging, ride-hailing, and more, in one place, relying on AI to offer personalised experiences based on user behaviour. Super apps are often created for customers to consolidate services, features and functions of multiple mobile apps into a single app. These applications are gaining popularity in emerging markets, where users prefer to use a single app for multiple needs – rather than switching between multiple apps."

Jordt says electronic proof of delivery (ePod) that is fully customisable is a 'must have' these days. "These could consist of digital documents such as an invoice or a delivery note, ensuring peace of mind and a time-stamped record that

packages have arrived safely at their destinations. This sign-on-glass technology, along with the fact that you can always see exactly where drivers are, assists with making better business decisions and delivering on promises to clients."

He says a newly-developed task and scheduling functionality on Ctrack's app allows for optimal use of resources and vehicles. "Real-time data allows for differentiation between planned and actual delivery and turnaround times, enabling fleet managers to continuously refine schedules due to unforeseen delays or traffic."

According to Bergh, super apps can make a massive difference in the FMCG supply chain. "We are heading down a slippery slope if transporters

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delivering to multiple retailers need to make use of different apps from each retailer to adhere to each retailer's needs on track and trace and ultimately electronic proof of delivery (ePOD). This is where super apps can play an important role and position a central ability for multiple apps to seamlessly run on one device and the end-user (being the driver) not having to train up on every different app and its usage."

Bergh explains that the initial fad of ePOD has now become a deep adoption, with some retailers leapfrogging transporters and insisting on non-negotiable uses of methods to provide instant ePODs.

Image courtesy of Pixabay



"We are seeing retailers leading the discussion and, in many cases, the actual development spend on technology solutions to provide ePOD by their transport parties and the wider transport network

being used. Drivers of these transporters are increasingly being forced to use different applications by each retailer's choice, to provide the sign-on glass' ability that justifies the need for ePOD."

As technology evolves, there will be many new niches waiting to be monetised and opportunities to take advantage of. Digital transformation and a data-driven culture will continue to disrupt businesses that cannot adapt to meet rapidly-changing customer preferences, new technologies and supply chains.

"That is why retail companies must provide customers with an experience that they find engaging, accessible, and valuable," says Bergh. "Businesses that make that first move to have thoughtful discussions about their needs and ideas with retail software developers and with supply chain software developers will be the forerunners in the future where consumers have more information available to them than ever before." **SR**



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Efficiency and accuracy drive automation in warehousing, lowering costs for retailers

Retailers are placing increasing pressure on their procurement and supply chain teams to drive changes that will improve the agility and resilience of their strategic sourcing processes. With the ever-changing retail landscape, the ability to quickly adapt to new trends and market conditions is becoming increasingly important, and retailers are looking to their procurement and supply chain teams to deliver results.

According to Renko Bergh, co-founder of Forte Supply Chain Solutions, leading companies in South Africa can find themselves stuck with outdated implementations of their warehouse management software (WMS), if they are not careful. ...

“Often companies don’t have the internal resources to address this issue with an innovative mindset that can truly yield results. This is where turning to the experts can make a difference. ”

He says the correct external partner can enable conversations that not only provide perspective, but also frame requirements in an accessible way, and even highlight some potential pitfalls.

“The aim of implementing a WMS should be to simplify and optimise operations. It must increase efficiency and provide visibility across the whole supply chain.”



Image courtesy of David Dibert, Pexels

Gerhard van Zyl, Group Operations Director at Asimotech, agrees, adding that the entire drive around technology and warehousing must be around efficiency and accuracy.



Gerhard van Zyl

“The quicker I can get the product out the warehouse and the more accurately I do that, the lower the cost. This means that materials handling equipment automation is one area where there will be an immediate benefit. For example, a warehouse can close over a weekend and the automated MHE equipment can pick all the bulk stock and have it ready for delivery on a Monday morning. ”





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The second area, he says revolves around the ability to accurately pick stock. “Hardware such as wearable AR units will become increasingly popular in the future. This does, however, require a level of understanding, as well as training for existing labour – which could pose a challenge.”

According to Brian Mudhokwani, Chief Operations Officer at ISB Optimus, technological advancements have led to the convergence of traditional brick-and-mortar stores and e-commerce platforms. “Examples include the rise of click-and-collect services, in-store digital kiosks, and virtual fitting rooms. Technology is helping retailers create a seamless, omnichannel shopping experience for their customers.”

The omnichannel, he says, is a hot trend that continues to gain in popularity.

“Retailers like Woolworths are adopting an omnichannel approach, where they are seamlessly integrating online and offline channels to provide a unified shopping experience for their customers. This strategy helps retailers reach a broader audience, improve customer engagement and increase sales.”

It has a profound impact, however, on the supply chain, requiring a bulk of automation to take place in the logistics process behind the retail outlet.

“The distribution warehouses and cross-dock facilities are where the real automation will have to take place, as the actual logistics costs to get the product to the retail outlet is where the cost-saving benefit, as well as the efficiency benefit, will come from,” says Van Zyl.



Image courtesy of Pixabay

Much has been happening in the warehouse space to deliver this. Technological advancements include automated storage and retrieval systems, robotic picking and packing, and a variety of WMS choices.

“Some of the key warehousing tech trends include the use of the Internet of Things in the smart warehouse,” says Mudhokwani.

“IoT devices are helping to monitor inventory levels, track assets, and optimise warehouse operations. AI-driven demand forecasting is another growing trend, where AI-based tools help predict demand more accurately, allowing retailers to optimise inventory management.”

Another development, says Van Zyl, is the utilisation of CCTV as a management tool, rather than a security tool, where the CCTV is integrated into the Augmented Reality (AR) hardware, as well as the WMS.

“This has the ability to get rid of a checking function in totality which will have huge cost savings. Add to this visibility on route and in the vehicles with cameras, as well as integration between receiving at the retail store side with the warehouse, and one can start anticipating orders on a just-in-time basis – rather than waiting for retailers to place orders.”

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This, says Van Zyl, will have a huge impact on stock holding as well as expired/returned products.

“The most exciting part about all of this is all the AI that is gathered on the back end of this. With this AI, one can start doing data mining and become far more pro-active and efficient.”

Adds Martin Bailey, Chairman of Industrial Logistic Systems (ILS): “The industry is changing rapidly in the face of robotics and automation. The bar for entry with automation is getting lower and lower. In the rest of the world, it is also getting more affordable and more flexible.”

Tech-driven disruption in retail logistics landscape drives change

Replacing repetitive tasks such as picking and packing with robotic systems improves efficiency and reduces human error. Planning will be easier and so also execution. “There is no denying that AI can revolutionise warehousing and logistics by automating a task, improving demand forecasting, optimising routing and scheduling, and enhancing overall supply chain efficiency,” says Mudhokwani.

“In South Africa, there are, however, some serious challenges to overcome. It requires high initial investment costs and it has to be integrated with existing systems, which is not easy. Employee training and adaptation to new technology are just as important.”

Van Zyl says another important consideration in the local context is the extremely high

Image courtesy of Quang Nguyen Vinh, Pexels



unemployment rate. “Added to that is our broken education system that leaves a massive balance required between automation and employment. In most instances when we automate, we won’t require as much traditional labour. This means existing employed labour will become redundant, which adds to the unemployment rate.”

A further difficulty is the level of labour required to implement and maintain automation is not as readily available and with the current levels of education available it seems unlikely that the trend will change in the nearby future.

“This leaves us with a difficult situation,” says Bailey. “We have shoppers who are demanding a multitude of products to be delivered in shorter periods.

If one considers the Checkers Sixty60 solution it essentially guarantees you delivery of just about anything the retailer has on its shelves, within an hour.”

Ongoing delivery of such a supply chain requires huge investment and in South Africa that does not come cheap.

“It is a problem,” agrees Van Zyl. “On the other hand, with labour costs increasing constantly and with unions becoming more aggressive because of the economic pressures and the unreliability that this introduces, more and more companies are considering automation.”

That does not necessarily mean that it is all moonshine and roses, says Bailey. “Another factor to consider when it comes to automation is, of course, single-point failure rather than looking at it from a hard or soft automation point of view. If you have equipment that runs off a single processor and that processor goes wrong, it can switch your entire system off – landing you in deep trouble.”

He says it is therefore essential when automating and introducing technology solutions that they are flexible and able to meet the exact needs of the business in question.

To further add to the challenges, other state-owned entities such as Eskom and Transnet are facing their own set of woes that generally affect businesses in the supply chain by increasing costs. "Yes, there are ways to get around this like installing generators or solar solutions, or using trucks rather than rail to get goods to and from the ports," continues Bailey. There is no denying that one can relatively easily overcome some of these technical challenges – but they cost money. It is nowadays not uncommon to find large warehouses spending several million rands a month on diesel and power back-up."

He says despite the host of technology solutions available, the bottom line is still cost. "The logistics sector is facing significant cost pressures, including rising fuel prices, increased transportation costs, and a shortage of skilled labour."

This directly means an increased cost to the retailer, who in turn is being forced to pass these higher costs onto consumers, which is impacting their purchasing power and placing a strain on household budgets.

"It will be interesting to see what AI does in our industry in the next few years. On the one hand, it will help with planning, forecasting and better methods of operation, but on the other hand, retailers still sell goods that arrive in boxes and our industry is still about moving those boxes. We have yet to find ways for AI to do those physical movements," says Bailey. **SR**

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AI-powered telematics transforming fleet management for safer, more efficient transport

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed the way transporters manage and monitor vehicle fleets – improving safety, enhancing efficiency, reducing costs and providing real-time insights.

According to Henry Smith, Fleets Sales Director at MiX Telematics Africa, multiple AI-integrated telematics solutions that utilise machine learning and AI to gather and interpret insights, are readily available on the market. He explains ...

“AI-powered systems can monitor driver behaviour, optimise routes, reduce idle time, and improve productivity. This technology provides real-time insights into driver behaviour and vehicle performance, enabling fleet managers to respond quickly to issues as they arise.”

He says AI integration takes away all the guesswork, as machine learning can interpret the driver's behaviour in real-time, allowing for immediate alerts and correction. Utilising video telematics technology allows for real-time alerts of any unsafe driving behaviours, making coaching and accident prevention simple.

More so, he says, telematics increases transparency throughout the supply chain, providing visibility into every stage of the process where a fleet is involved and ensuring that stakeholders

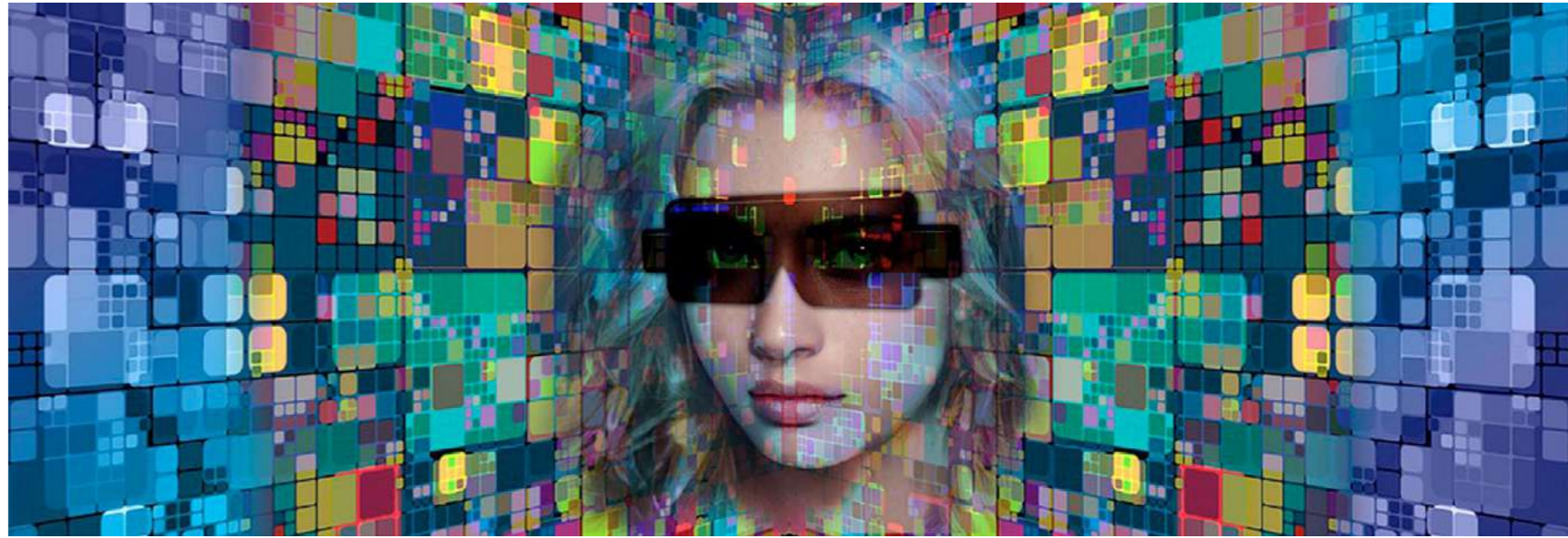


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have the information they need on hand to make decisions quicker and more accurately.

“By using telematics to track and monitor the supply chain, you can easily identify areas where costs can be reduced and optimise operations to improve efficiency.”

The benefits to the retail sector are vast. “It includes real-time tracking of assets, real-time data and insight to inform their business decisions, improved communication between retailers and their supply chain partners, ultimately resulting in increased efficiency and productivity.”

Brian Mudhokwani, Chief Operations Officer at ISB Optimus, says it goes even further if one starts

looking at the developments in the transport sector such as autonomous vehicles and drone deliveries.

“It all comes down to improved logistics efficiency, which in turn means reduced costs and enhanced customer satisfaction.”

SR



Catherine Larkin is a communication and marketing professional, specialising in Logistics, Transport and Supply Chain. Her company, CVLC Communication, is a corporate public relations, communication, marketing and events consultancy. Its services range from full secretariat support, project management and administration, strategy development, stakeholder engagement, through to event organisation, media, social media and publicity, as well as a range of writing and creative services.





The key to
improving operational efficiency

Leveraging retailer & supplier supply chain data

At the end of 2023, the most successful retailers and consumer goods companies will be those who use their supply chain data most efficiently to better understand consumer demand patterns and the overall impact of macroeconomic shifts.

This is the contention of Mikko Kärkkäinen, co-founder and group chief executive officer of RELEX Solutions.

“The top concern among our customers – both retail and consumer goods companies – is inflation,” he reveals. “They want to know what to expect if they raise the consumer price to shoulder the burden of increased energy, transportation, and raw materials costs.” Kärkkäinen advises companies to focus on improving operational efficiency by

leveraging retailer and supplier data to optimise the end-to-end supply chain.

“In the best-case scenario, your company will be the very last among your competitors to raise prices for customers,” he explains.

“In these economic times, it is critical that retailers and consumer brands be strategic with their prices and run their operations as efficiently as possible while streamlining their operating budgets.”

The improvement of operational efficiency is one of the biggest challenges an end-to-end supply chain solution can help solve through waste reduction and the elimination of unnecessary costs. Companies see a quick return on investment and

achieve better control of operations, enabling faster adjustment to shifts in demand and supply.

“Labour availability and cost are key considerations in today’s climate,” Kärkkäinen states.

“We have heard from our customers that one of the biggest reasons for out-of-stock products in their stores is due to not having enough people picking at their distribution centres. When retailers can accurately forecast the volume of work at both distribution centres and stores and have visibility into their logistics, they are able to smooth the flow of deliveries and match the workload to the number of staff available. This drives better in-store availability and online order fulfilment and ensures labour is scheduled efficiently.





“In my 25 years of working with forecasting and supply chain analytics, I have never seen a more challenging time for retail and consumer goods markets,” Kärkkäinen admits. He points to the pandemic and high inflation as having a continuing negative impact on the supply chain. Disruptions and inflation have encouraged consumers to alter their shopping behaviours to stretch grocery budgets further in the face of high inflation. For instance, many forego their favourite brands in favour of purchasing private-label products.

As customer demand patterns continue to change, consumer goods companies and retailers who rely on historical data alone will have a difficult time accurately forecasting customer demand in today’s rapidly shifting environment.

“Retailers need to be able to quickly pick up on demand changes to ensure the right inventory is available in the right places to secure product availability and avoid overstock,” stresses Kärkkäinen. “Likewise, consumer goods suppliers need to leverage retail data to access the same level of visibility, not only to



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manage supply but also to adjust their assortment, pricing, and promotion strategies to fit the demands of the current market.”

He strongly suggests retailers and consumer brands add machine learning technology to their toolkits.

“The right technology can significantly improve accuracy in demand forecasts, workforce, and merchandising plans – streamlining operations and establishing cost efficiencies in the entire supply chain.”

Kärkkäinen has seen first-hand that retailers and consumer goods companies who leverage technology to process the massive amount of data in their end-to-end supply chain fare better than those who don’t.

“Even in challenging times, our customers have been able to minimise waste, protect margins, optimise operations and focus on customer service,” he says. “The retailers and consumer goods companies who come out on top during these times of economic turbulence will be those who reap the benefits of an integrated supply chain technology that optimises operations and reduces labour costs.”

Organisations aiming to take their supply chain and retail planning to the next level will have the opportunity learn about the latest tools, technologies and trends at the upcoming 45th annual SAPICS Conference. Africa’s leading education, knowledge sharing and networking event for supply chain professionals takes place in Cape Town from 11 to 14 June 2023. RELEX



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For further information, or to register for the 2023 SAPICS Conference, call the Conference Secretariat at Upavon Management on 011 023 6701 or email info@upavon.co.za.

Up-to the-minute information is also posted on the SAPICS conference website: <https://conference.sapics.org/> **SR**

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