

MOBILE'S BENEFITS RIPPLE THROUGH SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

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The adoption of technology has any number of triggers: ease of use, interest in time-saving features or simply the “wow” factor that comes with sleek hardware.

But, in B2B, technology adoption is, at times, slow and, at other times, painstaking. And time, as it turns out, is a luxury that many SMBs do not have, especially when it comes to managing supply chains and all the moving parts therein.

The advent of mobile, a few decades in, has had an accelerating impact on supply chain management. As Kevin Beasley, CIO of VAI, an enterprise resource planning technology firm, noted in an interview with PYMNTS, smaller firms tend to approach technology adoption (including mobile) with reluctance, if giving it much thought at all. Key decision-makers, said Beasley, “are often too busy to spend much time” on longer-term planning that takes, say, mobile initiatives into

consideration. Or, alternatively, they may not have the infrastructure in place or the resources to commit to putting new infrastructure into place.

“By the time they get around to it,” said the executive, “they may have been pushed into it by a customer or a vendor.” Or, someone else, relatively nimbler or more technologically astute, can come in to steal business. Beasley cited the example of Uber, a key invader in its niche, that was able to leverage mobile in its own way.

For mobile adoption, the key work that can be done in the field, which Beasley noted can be done across a variety of verticals, can be accomplished with imaging, capture and scanning technology, which, at the point of purchase, can be used to ensure accuracy of orders, compliance or even improvement of sales, as they are realized on the spot.

For supply chains that rely heavily

on logistics, such as fleet-intensive and delivery-intensive verticals (think freight or manufacturing), the adoption rate of mobile technology tends to skew toward the newer companies, said Beasley, and specifically ones that are due for a refresh of their technologies already in place. For older firms, as evidenced, for example, in trucking, where clipboards, signatures and printed routes have sufficed, when it comes to mobile, “what has been nice to have now is necessary to have,” and mobile must expand beyond simple GPS. For mobile payments, especially in logistics and transport, the emergence of fleet cards, which can help track expenses and indeed even put a cap on funds that are spent by person or by trip, helps improve cash flow and cash flow visibility.

The reconciliation of this “in-the-field” data flow with back-office functions, said Beasley, comes as the manual processes that had taken place previously

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now have been freed from what might be termed an “islands of information” mentality and brought into a more unified whole. Along

with streamlined payments data, they also have insight available for back-office professionals (who might also be the head

of the smallest firms) and have consumer-level and, ultimately, business-level impact.

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