

Supply Chain Collaboration: Working in Tandem

Successful supply chain collaboration between shippers and their third-party logistics providers requires transparency, honest communication, and a commitment to forming a true partnership with shared goals and values. Come along for the ride.

By Tom Gresham



Supply chain partnerships can take on many forms and facets, and they also can experience widely varying levels of success. At the heart of a truly effective collaboration are two teams that are devoted to working together on a common cause, rather than operating on a foundation of self-interest. When the partnership goes right, the collaboration works seamlessly and supply chain efficiency gains can be profound and forever evolving.



Part of the Team

Among the key components of identifying and achieving supply chain efficiencies is ensuring that the partnership between a shipper and a service provider is efficient. Two organizations operating at arm's length rather than in alignment makes it more difficult for the teams to work in harmony to identify and pursue truly effective solutions. In effect, inefficiencies in the partnership lead to inefficiencies in the supply chain.

In January 2016, Agfa Graphics, a Belgium-based supplier to the printing industry, enlisted Kane Is Able, a third-party logistics provider based in Scranton, Pennsylvania, as its solutions partner for its Northeast regional hub. One strength of the partnership has been that KANE treats “the Agfa business as if it were their own,” notes Jonathan Ashton, Agfa’s vice president of operations for North America.

“KANE constantly reinforces the desire to improve and appreciate their customers—treating them like family,” Ashton says.

Partnering in Distribution

KANE’s distribution center in Scranton, Pennsylvania, serves as Agfa’s national distribution center. The center receives inbound products from Europe and Agfa’s other domestic manufacturing sites, as well as from third-party vendors and transfers from network distribution centers, according to Alex Stark, senior director of marketing for Kane Is Able.

Agfa’s line includes products such as lithograph aluminum plates, inks and cleaning chemicals used in print media. In addition, the Agfa product portfolio features materials for printing, such as banner rolls, foam boards, aluminum boards and signage. At the Scranton distribution center, KANE stores and distributes large printers, racking, stackers and other

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equipment that Agfa employs for retail, demo rooms and trade shows.

The partnership between KANE and Agfa allows for streamlined, efficient distribution of products throughout the country. The distribution center receives and processes orders in real time and ships them—using full truckload, less-than-truckload, courier, and parcel—to other Agfa locations and direct to customers both regionally and nationally.

“The distribution center operations even include performing customer-specific board material cuts using a vertical Hendrix saw, as well as building and repairing crating material for the larger printers and equipment that ships internationally to Agfa customers,” Stark says.

Well-honed coordination between Agfa and KANE has led to products passing through the distribution process with improved speed and lower costs, along with a customer-first focus and improved flexibility to meet business needs. “Because of this experience, Agfa is looking to expand our relationship with KANE to other regions of the country,” Ashton says.

Communication Breeds Contentment

Transparency and strong communication channels are critical components of an effective supply chain partnership. It is important that the communication goes both ways.

Clear communication not only can prevent misunderstandings but it also ensures that supply chain partners have a clear view of a shipper’s needs and desires and can tailor its services to meet them, while remaining aligned with the shipper’s objectives.

When the communication clicks and produces concrete results, it can lead to long-term collaborations. ■



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