

# EMERGING ABOVE & BEYOND

MANUFACTURING • SUPPLY CHAIN • TECHNOLOGY

**21 Insights for 2021**  
**from Manufacturing, Supply Chain**  
**& Technology Executives**

Presented by  **LMA**  
Consulting Group

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“*The supply chain has become strategic, and reshoring is on the rise.*”



## **INTRODUCTION**

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic consumed manufacturers, distributors and product-related organizations like healthcare. Manufacturing and logistics became 'essential' in the public eye. The topic of the supply chain soared in popularity as everyone tried to understand why stores couldn't keep enough stock of essentials such as toilet paper. Significant risks to the global supply chain were exposed, and dependence on China concerned almost every executive. Manufacturers suddenly started to do more than rethink manufacturing and supply chain strategies; they began to act! The supply chain has become strategic, and reshoring is on the rise.

A superior customer experience has separated the weak from the strong. Manufacturers that responded rapidly to changing customer needs during the pandemic have sped ahead of the competition, whereas those that struggled to keep up, let alone raise the bar to provide value-add products and services, are barely surviving at best. The strong are partnering with customers to understand and predict changing downstream customer behaviors and evolving needs to take advantage of the opportunities and solidify their position in the marketplace.

The most successful organizations are resilient, collaborative and innovative. They can quickly adapt to changing conditions, rapidly scale and take advantage of opportunities as they arise. These executives do not see binary decisions; instead, they look at the gestalt for opportunities and disruptors and believe in the power of their people. As baby boomers retire at an increasing rate, spurred by the pandemic, and the pace of technology changes exponentially, those executives who attract, retain and develop the best people will thrive post-COVID.

*(continued)*

The digital transformation will accelerate the pace of change at a rate of 4 to 1. Manufacturers are evaluating automation, robotics, machine learning, AR/ VR, digital twins, additive manufacturing, modern ERP and other technologies that will tailor to customer needs on the fly, more efficiently and profitably. E-commerce, predictive analytics, business intelligence, IoT, autonomous robots, blockchain, WMS and more are differentiating the leaders from the laggards. The appropriate use of technology can create adaptability, scalability and responsiveness – all vital to post-pandemic success.

Manufacturing is on the move. For high labor cost products, China is losing to Vietnam, India, and Central and South America. For value-add and essential products, the US and EU will re-shore, customize and personalize on the fly and expand regional partnerships. Made in the USA will gain traction. Retooling, redesigning and re-skilling will have to rise to the occasion. E-commerce will continue to advance by leaps and bounds, changing distribution models and elevating the importance of the last mile and the technological transformation. The more technology and change, the more talent will become the critical differentiator.

More companies will pull ahead of the pack, as we emerge from the pandemic, than any other period in our lifetime. Will you struggle to stay afloat or solidify your position for decades to come? 2021 is your opportunity.

I asked experts in various disciplines to provide key learnings from 2020 and how they expect to adapt in 2021.



**Lisa Anderson**  
President, LMA Consulting Group  
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*2020 highlighted the need for adaptability and cooperation.*”



**MICHAEL SMITH**

President, Managing Director  
George Fischer Signet  
El Monte, California

2020 highlighted the need for adaptability and cooperation. These are core cultural elements for any organization to survive the challenges in a global environment.

Leveraging new collaboration technologies, hybrid work models and making necessary structural changes are only possible when the underlying behavioral elements are there for us to leverage.

Thriving, not just surviving, was the mantra we developed during 2020. This strategy will serve us well as we emerge strong in the post-pandemic era of 2021 and beyond. There are still many unknowns for recovery. Continuing to develop the company culture and aligning our processes and systems will be the key to success. By adopting new technologies and new solutions to foster growth in the new year, we can set a strong foundation for the years to come.



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*A significant learning from 2020 was the acceleration of eCommerce. eCommerce adoption will accelerate by three years in 2021.*”

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**KALON Z. STEPHEN**

Regional Vice President  
Salesforce, Inc.  
Chicago, IL

A significant learning from 2020 was the acceleration of eCommerce. eCommerce adoption will accelerate by three years in 2021.

We will experience the rise of the 'all-digital customer' - the customer who only interacts with a brand digitally. While we will see a continuation in the increase of B2C adoption in 2021, we will also see more B2B buying online.

How can your organization win? Meet your customer anywhere they are.

Invest in digital commerce technology to meet your customers' buying needs, wherever they are, with consumer-grade experiences.

Optimize your order management capabilities to be able to fulfill from anywhere and increase customer satisfaction. Fulfillment will become a competitive differentiator for brands as consumer expectations for fast, free shipping will only increase.

Personalization via Artificial Intelligence technology will become an increasingly important capability in 2021 as customers crave unique and personal experiences amidst record amounts of time spent virtually.

Short-form video and social shopping via TikTok, Facebook and Instagram will become a major way consumers buy-in 2021.

Organizations that invest digitally will be the next decade's winners, while those who underinvest will find themselves obsolete.



“*...transforming systems so that everything is accessible, flexible and integrated is absolutely key to ongoing business success.*”



**DAN KRAUS**

VP, Global Sales & Marketing  
Vision33  
Irvine, CA

In 2021, companies need to be aggressively working to streamline their business-critical application software. Based on what we experienced in 2020, transforming systems so that everything is accessible, flexible and integrated is absolutely key to ongoing business success.

Our advice is to consolidate into fewer systems in the cloud or hosted off-site with excellent remote access. Then, make sure all your systems can exchange data with each other without needing a human to move data out into spreadsheets or other tools before importing it to a new application.

It is essential to change your integration technologies, reporting tools and automation software to be application independent. That way, you can shift vendors and applications without worrying about breaking your connection between systems. If you haven't looked at integration platforms vs. a bespoke point-to-point connection, now is the time to do so. And, if you haven't implemented basic accounting automation for expenses, sales orders and purchasing, now is the time to make the change.

If your business survived the shutdowns of 2020, you've proven you're flexible. Now the key is to build in flexibility and agility, aka resilience, to everything you do.





“*Manufacturers and distributors now have an opportunity not just to shore up their supply chains but to promote the competitive advantages their distribution capabilities provide for their customers.*”



**LINDA POPKY**

President

Leverage2Market Associates,  
Redwood Shores, CA

The coming year is one of recovery and rebound. As the global population is vaccinated and the pandemic comes under control, consumers and businesses will be challenged. They will be responding to changes in purchasing behavior and pent-up demand for products and services that were off-limits through most of 2020.

Technology became critical to survival last year for businesses, consumers, educators—even sports teams. As the world returns to a more open state, we will see technology applied in different ways. Some processes (like mobile bank deposits) will remain. Others (like fully remote learning for K-12 schools) will likely disappear as soon as feasibly possible. In the middle will be technologies that can be integrated with in-person experiences in a hybrid fashion.

From toilet paper to vaccines, supply chain distribution entered the public consciousness in 2020. Manufacturers and distributors now have an opportunity not just to shore up their supply chains but to promote the competitive advantages their distribution capabilities provide for their customers.



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*Honest, authentic, frequent communication, especially during a crisis, will result in long-term customers and loyal employees, the lifeblood to every business.*

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**KATHLEEN MCENTEE**

President

Kathleen McEntee and Associates, Ltd.  
La Quinta, CA and Chicago, IL

The pandemic taught many companies the importance of crisis communications. We all saw the hysteria around supply shortages, airline travel, safety protocols and other products and services that were typically taken for granted. And, we saw how the lack of good communication exacerbated shortages and pummeled business.

Strong leaders had good crisis communications protocols in place and communicated regularly to their customers, employees and suppliers. Emails, videos, webinars and social media all took on new and different personas as companies took to digital means to communicate. In turn, customers and employees showed their loyalty and support.

Companies that leveraged technology and e-commerce before the pandemic capitalized on their infrastructures and leaned on their e-commerce platforms. Even those with limited infrastructures or who fell victim to the circumstances, like restaurants, leveraged communication platforms and got creative to stay connected with customers and employees. Many were rewarded with customer and employee support when circumstances allowed.

Out of sight, out of mind - still holds true. Honest, authentic, frequent communication, especially during a crisis, will result in long-term customers and loyal employees, the lifeblood to every business.





“ *Organizations will be most successful with security if they can create a culture where every individual understands that they are responsible for playing their part.* ”



**COURTNEY CASEY**

Director of Marketing  
Accent Computer Solutions, Inc.  
Ontario, California

Technology enabled many organizations to be nimble in 2020. Smart companies are going to use what they learned to guide their improvements in 2021. They will look at what held them back and make changes to leverage technology to grow and ride out difficult times. Technology changes can mean anything from updating the phone system and moving their infrastructure to the cloud to optimizing their remote workforce.

For many companies, remote work is here to stay in one form or another. With a remote workforce, you are essentially operating as a multi-location business. Each employee device is an endpoint that must be managed with advanced security tools. The need for acceptable use and access policies becomes even more critical when working in different environments. Cybersecurity awareness training is a must for everyone, no matter their work location.

Supply chains are going to see cybersecurity standards being pushed down from the top. If you are in a government supply chain, you have most likely been introduced to NIST regulations or Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC). And, most companies need help to translate cybersecurity regulations into actionable security controls.

Organizations will be most successful with security if they can create a culture where every individual understands that they are responsible for playing their part.



“ *Those who fail to deliver on promises will be short-lived with a high cost of failure.* ”



**ROBERT (BOB) GJERDE**

President  
ACT Fulfillment, Inc.  
Mira Loma, California

Rather than focus on the apparent disruptors and "shiny" distractions, this is an excellent time to perfect your solution. Fundamentals will prevail through the various challenges from the pandemic, politics and upward and downward economic trends. Supply chain quality and waste reduction will continue to be a sought-after resource as businesses struggle through this period.

The distribution of goods will continue at a harried pace towards DTC (direct-to-consumer) solutions with new players entering the race. Being aware of these changes and the resulting opportunities has been, and will be, important for companies but only for those that can execute.

The 2020 supply chain execution failures prompted changes and highlighted opportunities in the market. Those who fail to deliver on promises will be short-lived with a high cost of failure. A great team with discipline and stable resource strategies will make the transition.

Companies faced with the most significant challenges are those who lack discipline. Solid, well-organized teams have prevailed and are emerging stronger. There is a talent pool available who can fill core positions making difficult periods productive and rewarding. The immediate future is an excellent time to find the grindstone, stay focused on what matters and gain momentum in supply chain excellence. Due to the inevitable industry contraction, growth will find you, be ready.



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*To enable scalable growth, we are modernizing and upgrading our ERP system and evaluating e-commerce platforms that will support customer growth in B2B and B2C markets.*

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**DAVE BERTRAM**  
CEO  
Helmet House, LLC  
Calabasas, California

Since the pandemic, our direct consumer drop ships have increased significantly with B2B customers. Traditional shipments to brick and mortar dealers dropped off as consumers flocked to e-commerce. Products sold through e-commerce dealers increased by 8 points from 22% to 30% of the business. I don't see the consumer shift to e-commerce reversing significantly as the pandemic gets under control due to the fact that consumer shopping habits have changed permanently.

To enable scalable growth, we are modernizing and upgrading our ERP system and evaluating e-commerce platforms that will support customer growth in B2B and B2C markets. We have already invested in warehouse automation and redesign projects to improve efficiencies.

To further improve our response to the increase in dropships and e-commerce orders, we plan to further expand our warehousing management capabilities (WMS) to enable greater efficiencies and customer responsiveness.





“*There will be a resurgence of companies that decide to either identify and implement a new system or reconfigure their existing ERP system to improve this visibility and capability.*”



**DAVE OGILVIE**

David Ogilvie Consulting  
Brisbane, Australia

Clients should be thinking about how to make better use of technology in 2021. They should evaluate how they use their current technology and incorporate newly released technology into their business.

COVID-19 has moved everyone's focus from interacting in-person to remote working online. Companies have quickly pivoted their use of technology to cater to this new environment. In many cases, smart and proactive executives also pivoted their business models to adapt their capabilities to new markets and products. Many found that their business systems did not provide the data and financial visibility needed to support decision making in the new environment.

There will be a resurgence of companies that decide to either identify and implement a new system or reconfigure their existing ERP system to improve this visibility and capability. This is an ideal time to look at how to incorporate the growing number of new technologies, such as AI and Blockchain, to help catapult business in this new normal.



“*The lessons we learned in 2020 were really old ones: Have good business fundamentals in place...A healthy supply chain and a good supply chain strategy to sustain the business is critical.*”



**TODD SNELBAKER**

Vice President & General Manager  
Gerard Daniel Worldwide  
Fontana, CA

Many businesses were thinking, *let's get 2020 behind us, and everything will be ok.* As we moved into January 2021, I believe they realized that we still have more challenging days ahead. However, I am optimistic that we will see improving economic conditions.

The lessons we learned in 2020 were really old ones:

Have good business fundamentals in place (people, processes, systems and cash) to react quickly to changing customer needs and demand.

A healthy supply chain and a good supply chain strategy to sustain the business is critical.

With a new Administration taking office in 2021, its policies will play into manufacturing, international trade, technology and regulations. The quick, nimble and well-financed will be in the best positions to grow as the economy recovers in 2021.





“*The only way to improve is through your most valuable resource, your people.*”



**JON ARMSTRONG**

Owner/Vice President  
Do It American Manufacturing Company  
Corona, California

As I reflected on 2020, I recognized how our workforce grew, not in terms of numbers, but in terms of strengths, skills and fortitude. When presented with a challenge, our shop floor workers accomplished things we didn't expect. While our team grappled with the pandemic's uncertainty, they also made sound, responsible decisions. They showed that they cared about the success of the company and the well-being of their coworkers.

My early mentors from Toyota taught me that people are our most valuable resource. We founded the company on the belief that a California manufacturer could successfully compete with China, and it has proven true. People can carry a company through challenges, and they create improvement. Reshoring will continue to rise.

After being restricted from personal interaction throughout the pandemic, we look forward to times without social distancing or face masks and when customers can visit again. Who would have thought we would miss trade shows? And, while conferencing platforms have become part of how we conduct business, wouldn't life be better with a little less Zoom?

2021 will be challenging with new burdens like global pressures, cost increases and regulations imposed by government officials who don't have business backgrounds. Despite the bumps, be ready to take advantage of the opportunities. The brutal reality of the pandemic is the gaps created by companies that failed.

I genuinely believe that no matter the pressures, new technological challenges, competitive threats or where we are in the economic cycle, it comes down to consistently improving. The only way to improve is through your most valuable resource, your people. That is important for 2021 and beyond.



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*Smart money will be heavily invested in the North American industrial sector.*

”

**ART KOCH**

President

Arthur Koch Management Consulting  
Miami, Florida

The pandemic of 2020 was a seismic disruption to the world's supply chains that sent a tidal wave through industrial and retail sectors. Depending on the survey, 76% to 84% of executives said they needed to rethink their manufacturing footprint and supply chain strategy. They have indicated plans to compress lead-times by reshoring and insourcing operations-critical parts to regain their supply base.

As a possible validation of this mindset, 2020 Institute of Supply Management (ISM) Purchasing Managers Index for December 2020 increased to 60.7 (anything above 50 indicated growth). There is no coincidence between executives signaling their desire for reshoring and insourcing and the PMI registering a seventh consecutive month of growth.

Let's pause for a moment and reflect on the fact that private equity has \$1.5 trillion (yes, TRILLION) of dry power ready to invest. Smart money will be heavily invested in the North American industrial sector. Based on this, the next three to five years indicate strong growth in NA industrials. In turn, this will drive demand for professionals in operations and supply chain to support the resurgence.





“Manufacturers have a keen opportunity to understand that logistics service providers can be strategic partners.”



**PATRICK DALY**

Managing Director  
Alba Consulting  
Dublin, Ireland

There are enormous opportunities for innovation and improvement in building stronger strategic relationships between manufacturers and their logistics services providers. While these relationships have developed over several decades, they have often been transactional and tactical roles. Often considered a necessary evil, they failed to become strategic, value-added partnerships. When they build and nurture these relationships, our clients have found that they bolster and enhance both the manufacturer and logistics service provider's competitive positions.

Manufacturers have a keen opportunity to understand that logistics service providers can be strategic partners. Not only are they some of the most networked businesses that exist, but they also span multiple sectors, markets and geographical regions. Manufacturers stand to become more familiar with global best practices, market intelligence, and insights into business developments and trends, helping them differentiate.

The opportunities are limitless. Going beyond warehousing, transport and distribution, and engaging channel partners to form strategic partnerships can help manufacturers. They stand to gain access to additional markets at home and abroad, extend their supply chain capabilities, and gain access to skills, knowledge and experience not available internally. The partnerships formed by the pharmaceutical industry during the pandemic, which resulted in quick and efficient vaccine distribution to vaccine hubs, is a perfect example.



“*One thing emerged more than any other trend, hyper-personalization... There has been more innovation in customer personalization in the last year than ever before.*”



**TIM HARRIS**  
Chief Strategy Officer  
Arbela Technologies  
Irvine, California

2020 was an unprecedented year for eCommerce in both B2B and B2C. With over 150% growth of eCommerce transactions last year, those who had eCommerce needed to figure out how to differentiate and capture more market share while serving their current customer base during the pandemic. New entrants to online selling added additional competition.

One thing emerged more than any other trend, hyper-personalization. This emphasized the need for the right customer data platform to understand, target and convert your prospective buyers into sales while promoting and incentivizing your brand advocates.

There has been more innovation in customer personalization in the last year than ever before.



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*Resiliency, creativity and innovation will continue to be the winning themes for 2021.*”



**MARGARET "PEGGY" HOSKING**

Partner  
Best Best & Krieger  
Riverside, California

Resiliency, creativity and innovation will continue to be the winning themes for 2021. 2021 promises to be a year of hopeful recovery. Successful businesses pivoted and came up with creative solutions to overcome challenges in 2020. For many, surprisingly, they outperformed 2019.

With the Covid-19 vaccine rollout, there is hope that we will return to an "in-person" world in the near future. However, businesses will continue to deal with employee issues such as staffing, sick leave, testing and the like. Whether or not to require vaccination will likely become a hot topic, as will a focus on corporate culture and diversity. Many businesses discovered that their workforce shifted adroitly to a remote platform that creates unique opportunities as well as legal and tax challenges. Attracting and retaining key talent may become more critical in areas where a daily physical presence is no longer required. Retooling and redeploying existing employees will create additional resiliency for most companies. A remote or hybrid workforce may drive the reimagination of office space.

A new Administration will hopefully encourage a speedy economic recovery. Tariffs, supply chains, automation and efficiencies will continue to be important factors for manufacturing. There will be additional lease and loan renegotiations, but we anticipate that commercial real estate will continue to perform overall.

In all, companies that are creative, forward-thinking problem solvers will continue to flourish in 2021.





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*Incorporating risk into critical decision processes will drive a mindset of "engineering the supply chain" from the more traditional mode of "engineering the balance sheet."* ”



**CHRISTOPHER GOPAL, PH.D.**

Faculty, UCSD, USC & formerly Drucker School of Management  
Global Supply Chain & Operations Consultant  
San Diego, California

Risk management and mitigation have always been top of mind for management. During and following every crisis, everyone resolves to do it effectively. When confronted with the thought, effort and short-term costs required, many companies forget it, drop it or just revert to a "hope for the best" strategy.

Going forward, risk - operational, potential and unpredictable - is and will be an integral part of supply chain decisions. Components include inventory, hedging, financing, sourcing and location, security, Information Technologies, IP theft and government tariffs. The risk objectives include reducing time and cost to recovery, revenue maintenance and advantage, supply assurance and intellectual property protections. These change the models, costs, trade-offs and strategies with risk as one of the critical decision factors.

Incorporating risk into critical decision processes will drive a mindset of "engineering the supply chain" from the more traditional mode of "engineering the balance sheet."



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*Subscription-pricing will  
disrupt manufacturing.*”



**ROBBIE KELLMAN BAXTER**

President  
Peninsula Strategies  
Menlo Park, CA

Subscription-pricing will disrupt manufacturing. Today, subscriptions are everywhere. But is the industrial world ready? Recurring revenue is increasingly a priority in areas like heavy equipment, aerospace, manufacturing and defense.

Both digital natives and industrial natives are accelerating their strategies to build more predictable revenue streams. Still, only a few are building these new offerings around a forever promise to their customers. The winners will be the ones who move away from a product-centric orientation. Instead, those aligning their offerings to the ongoing and changing needs of their subscribers will succeed.

When organizations think of their customers as members and optimize long-term, it leads to change across all functional areas and much stickier (and happier) relationships. Subscription-pricing will disrupt manufacturing.



*Prepare alongside suppliers to ramp up quickly.*



**DIANE GARCIA**

President  
Lorraine Consulting  
Portland, OR

In 2020, we uncovered just how connected humanity is. A virus traveled effortlessly through airports, across oceans and throughout the globe. At the same time, we discovered that our supply chains were unknowingly disconnected, causing significant disruptions in all sorts of industries. Business leaders were forced to make complex decisions and pivot overnight. Organizations responded to real-time shifts in consumer behavior, imposed isolation and new technologies.

The good news is that eCommerce is here to stay. But, we should remain prepared for new trends to emerge. One possible outcome is a more physically connected world, as the pendulum swings against digital connections.

Here are some thoughts to consider:

- Invest in a flexible online ordering platform. Make the checkout process seamless for your customers.
- Upgrade infrastructure within your order fulfillment cycle and integrating your systems. For example, does a customer order immediately trigger your supply chain?
- Prepare alongside suppliers to ramp up quickly. Include capacity flex and warehouse overflow options.
- Strive to imagine the unimaginable.





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*...we expect to see the strongest demand for people who can directly generate revenue in a sales-related role or support capacity.*

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**DAVID C. PORTER**

Partner, Executive Recruiter  
Orion Solutions Group  
Brea, California

2021 is starting as a continuation of the very strong market developed in the second half of 2020. Demand from providers of all types of supply chain services, from warehousing and trucking to ocean and rail, is off the charts. Capacity has been strained.

Predictions are that this should take us through the 1st quarter, at a minimum. This bodes well for carriers and providers from a rate perspective since many had to maintain or trim rates in 2020, relative to 2019.

Businesses seem optimistic and have turned up their hiring efforts after many went through COVID-related layoffs in 2020. From a supply chain hiring perspective, we expect to see the strongest demand for people who can directly generate revenue in a sales-related role or support capacity. Demand for those with the latest data, reporting and software development/implementation/integration skills will continue to be in very high demand.

We expect 2021 to be the strongest year we have seen since 2018 for hiring and overall activity in the supply chain sector. This is assuming vaccine rollout is well executed and optimism from the business community around the country's ability to deal with the virus is maintained.



“It is never the situation but how you react to it that matters.”



**EVAN BULMER**  
CEO

Evan Bulmer & Associates  
Adelaide, Australia

The fear and panic throughout the pandemic taught me three things.

**First:** It is never the situation but how you react to it that matters. As the gravity of COVID-19 hit marketplaces worldwide, some businesses bunkered down and hoped things would get better. Others were able to drive rapid change in months that would have otherwise taken years. There is always opportunity in adversity.

**Second:** The importance of the customer. This is particularly so when they disappear, as many did, during the pandemic. Loving the customer has never been more critical, especially in a fear-driven marketplace.

**Third:** Cash is king – deep pockets matter. Strong balance sheets matter when a crisis hits. Knowing your business model and how your business converts revenue to cash in the bank has never been more critical.

A lot of companies and individuals have built cash reserves. This is because many lifestyle expenses are no longer options; governments worldwide have provided a stimulus to both businesses and individuals, and, assuming demand didn't completely drop off a cliff, companies have experienced growth - or certainly no decline. For these reasons, I say get ready for the 'Roaring 20s' - boom time is coming!





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*Expect to see shippers and carriers embrace the technology tools and partner with the digitally-forward transportation partners to optimize and scale their businesses in 2021.*”



**JOHN CENTERS**  
Chief Sales Officer  
Redwood Logistics  
Atlanta, Georgia

Resilience and flexibility are the focal themes for the transportation industry in 2021.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, manufacturers, distributors, and brick and mortar retailers will take a good hard look at their shipping operations. They will spend the early part of the new year identifying areas of improvement to bounce back and build more flexible, responsive logistics networks.

Technology adoption and integration will play pivotal roles in strategies. Shippers will gain greater visibility, attain control and leverage data aggregation to make more informed business decisions to prevent increased costs and limited resource allocation.

Transportation management software (TMS) and integration platforms will get more attention in 2021. Many third-party logistics (3PLs) providers will shift their attention to provide customers with the necessary digital tools to create fully connected enterprises.

For early Q1, the shipping environment is promising. Consumer demand and positive economic recovery continue to drive more freight into the marketplace. Expect to see shippers and carriers embrace the technology tools and partner with the digitally-forward transportation partners to optimize and scale their businesses in 2021.



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