Gartner for Supply Chain
Supply Chain Top 25 for 2021
Lessons from leaders

Each year, our analysts research the supply chains of hundreds of companies. Through this work, we note what leaders are focusing on, where they are investing time and effort, and what can be applied broadly. Three key trends stand out this year for these leaders that are accelerating their capabilities and further separating themselves from the rest of the pack.

2021 lessons from leaders

- The purpose-driven organization
- Customer-driven business transformation
- The digital-first supply chain
If ever there was a time that supply chain has operated at the intersection of people, planet and purpose, it is now. Many in this year’s Top 25 were quite literally helping save the world and keeping society running during the darkest days of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Now, with the environmental sustainability domain a hotbed of activity, there is an opportunity to solve longer-term environmental and social challenges.

In large corporate supply chains, we’re seeing more ambitious sustainability goals being set in alignment with science-based targets. And fortunately, the plans to achieve these goals look more prescriptive than they have in years past. Most investments are now made to benefit both planet and business.

At a strategic level, sustainability factors like carbon emissions are considered among traditional cost and service trade-offs. Optimizing inbound supply and distribution networks to take vehicles off roads and reduce the use of carbon-intensive air freight fall squarely into the “doing well by doing good” category. At a product and packaging level, we see experimentation with more recyclable and compostable materials and creative solutions for increasing shipping density.

Some products are being designed for circularity, while others are sold in a fashion that drives a smaller customer environmental footprint.

Some process-based companies are reusing heat from upstream manufacturing processes to power others downstream.

Leading purpose-driven organizations are not simply supporting a varied list of “green” initiatives and people-related programs; they have integrated these into a larger strategy alongside commercial partners, as both B2B and B2C customers increasingly demand higher sustainability and ethical standards from suppliers. Some are even leveraging product marketing budgets to fund their work and integrating it into brand messages, instead of treating environmental, social and governance (ESG) investments as a purely operational cost.

Beyond the natural environment, many supply chain organizations have increased focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Some have even linked employee bonus compensation to progress against DEI goals. Outside of internal workforces, many have also expanded supplier diversity programs. Finally, many corporate CEOs and, by proxy, heads of supply chain, are addressing social issues like racism in society and healthcare head on.

It is encouraging to see supply chain organizations delivering on the business’s purpose to better serve customers, suppliers, employees and communities, simultaneous with shareholders.

**Deliver on the business’s purpose through supply chain:**

Follow four steps to develop a purpose-driven supply chain

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The purpose-driven organization
Prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, corporate supply chains faced a dynamic competitive landscape driven by escalating customer requirements and competition from both existing players and new market entrants. The pandemic drove intermittent supply disruptions, larger-than-normal demand swings and an accelerated level of business model transformation, requiring supply chains to be highly adaptive. Many changes were driven by an outsized uptick in products and services delivered directly to customers and patients, instead of through more traditional, centralized locations such as physical stores and medical facilities. At the same time, “as-a-service” models and customer-composable solutions rose in prominence in industries such as high tech and industrial.

Retail was ground zero for shifts in consumer buying behaviors. Retailers reported daily e-commerce volumes at levels originally forecast for 2023 or 2024. Grocery, general merchandise and hardware stores saw double-digit percentage increases in the use of buy-online-pickup-at-store (BOPIS), causing them to reconfigure product flows and store associate roles. Apparel retailers saw tremendous shifts from brick-and-mortar channels to direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales, which in turn required significant investments in fulfillment center automation to handle elevated e-commerce orders.

As DTC orders have increased as a percentage of sales, the higher cost of last-mile delivery has led to an increase in model innovation and partnership. For example: Sharing omnichannel space in shopping malls; co-sharing brick-and-mortar space for specialty sales and expanded e-commerce returns offerings. Organizationally, some heads of retail supply chains are adding real estate and site construction to their remits to signal that “unified commerce” is the future, across a much different distribution network and store footprint.

In 2020 many consumer product companies reduced portfolio SKU counts by a quarter to a third, trimming long-tails that had formed over several years of expansion. This addressed supply constraints and, in some cases, surging demand. Some companies added the ability to finish orders through their distribution network to keep pace with more volatile demand signals.

In the healthcare industry, telehealth increased dramatically for doctor appointments, home-managed care of preexisting conditions and mental health therapy. The wartime-like ramp up of vaccine manufacturing and distribution capacity across the major pharmaceutical players was impressive.

Overall, the supply chains most able to adapt to shifting business conditions won in the marketplace. We expect this to be a winning trait for the foreseeable future, as market disruptions now feel more like climate than weather.

→ Act now on five postpandemic trends to achieve supply chain transformation: Download the Future of Supply Chain e-book
A survey of boards of directors taken late in 2020 showed that nearly 70% of companies accelerated their digital roadmaps, as compared to the beginning of the year. Supply chain leaders have reached a point in their transformation journeys where they consider themselves “digital first” in the use of technology to enable more seamless customer experiences and more automated and insightful decisions in supply and product management, at scale.

A common feature underpinning this state is a shift toward common ERP platforms, processes and datasets that can be leveraged for insight and decision making. These new platforms typically come with improved cybersecurity, helping mitigate a major risk for most companies.

In planning, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) analyze supply constraints in real time and balance market share, profit and customer support objectives. In transportation, some can now dynamically monitor and manage shipments and intercept late in-flight deliveries where necessary to maintain customer commitments.

Consumer product and electronics companies have continued building downstream visibility through technology. Some of the more advanced companies are also analyzing an ensemble of big data in B2C, gleaning consumer insights from unstructured social media posts, syndicated market data, and internal demand and supply information.

In B2B, leaders are establishing more customer-listening posts (e.g., signals, surveys) to capture sentiment at key moments across critical channels. These insights are fed back to operational teams to help prioritize where further actions and investments are required.

Shop floor automation continues in factory environments. Some of the more advanced players are now using centralized, remote factory monitoring. Major business model shifts have also accelerated automation in distribution and fulfillment centers over the past 12 months.

Digital transformation would not be possible without the right talent. AI, ML and big data analysis are the most common capabilities. Several advanced supply chain organizations run digital literacy and dexterity programs to enable employees to better understand and exploit digital business opportunities and learn how to use data-driven analytics for more informed decision making in their roles.

Given the rapid pace of digital transformation, change management is a critical organizational skill set. Supply chain leaders position new digital technologies as a means for employees to stop spending time on manual, non-value-added activities, so they can focus on customer value.

→ Reach supply chain autonomy by 2035: Download the three-step roadmap to experiment, pilot and roll out hyperautomation
Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 for 2021

01
Cisco Systems

02
Colgate-Palmolive

03
Johnson & Johnson

04
Schneider Electric

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Nestlé

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Intel

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PepsiCo

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Walmart

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Turn the page to read profiles of the companies ranked 1-10. Clients may read additional profiles (the companies ranked 11-25) at gartner.com. See the Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 most relevant to your geography or industry at gartner.com/en/supply-chain-top-25.
Cisco Systems

High-tech leader Cisco Systems ranks No. 1 in the Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 for 2021. Considerable revenue growth, strength in ESG and recognition of leadership in the community opinion polls drove Cisco to the top spot for the second consecutive year.

- Demonstrated revenue growth, strength in ESG and leadership in the supply chain community
- Set ambitious greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals for 2025
- Prioritized video conferencing and critical infrastructure capabilities for hospitals and vaccine research

Facing a once-in-a-generation global pandemic, Cisco leveraged its resilience and agility to prioritize video conferencing and critical infrastructure capabilities for hospitals and vaccine research.

Furthermore, Cisco’s sustainability requirements are embedded in its supply chain business processes to help ensure continuous improvement and drive impactful change. In 2016, Cisco set aggressive targets for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction by 2020. Having achieved the objectives one year ahead of schedule, the company has now set two new goals for 2025:

1. 30% less GHG emissions in Cisco’s supply chain, and
2. 80% of Cisco’s component, manufacturing and logistics suppliers by spend will have a public GHG emissions reduction target.
Colgate-Palmolive's commitment to reducing its impact on the environment is evident in the effort to go beyond Zero Waste and be certified as TRUE Zero Waste through an external certification program owned by the US Green Building Council. Since 2017, 20 of Colgate-Palmolive's manufacturing sites have achieved TRUE Zero Waste certification, with 13 of them achieving platinum status, the highest level of recognition.

Colgate-Palmolive was also named to Fast Company’s 2021 list of the World’s Most Innovative Companies for developing a first-of-its-kind recyclable plastic tube and openly sharing the technology with third parties.
Healthcare leader Johnson & Johnson retained the No. 3 spot in the Gartner for Supply Chain Top 25 for 2021. J&J remains unparalleled in the life science industry, possessing enduring leadership, operational strengths and expertise in supporting innovation.

- Demonstrated innovation expertise and supply chain resilience and agility
- Made continued strides toward achieving 100% environmentally conscious packaging by 2025
- Leveraged 3D printing and partnerships to solve the COVID-19 ventilator crisis

In fact, in 2021, J&J won the Gartner Power of the Profession Award for Customer or Patient Innovation of the Year for its work leveraging 3D printing and partnerships to solve the COVID-19 ventilator crisis.

Another way J&J addresses resilience and agility is using vertical integration to address supply chain bottlenecks.

Matching demand and supply remains a priority and critical capability for J&J. For example, using data science and complex algorithms, J&J can monitor typical order patterns and flag major deviations. This technology automatically monitors hundreds of thousands of orders placed by big customers, such as medical centers and governments. If the algorithm detects an unusual pattern, it alerts supply chain professionals to investigate.

ESG continues to be a priority for J&J as well. Its Healthy Lives Mission includes conversion to 100% recyclable, reusable or compostable plastic, recycled paper and pulp-based packaging by 2025.
French energy management and automation specialist Schneider Electric retained the No. 4 spot in the Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 for 2021.

- Remained steadfast in its commitment to advance the practice of supply chain management
- Demonstrated leadership in developing the supply chain ecosystem
- Leveraged its connected technology infrastructure to create outsized value for its customer base

Schneider succeeded over the past several years in delivering on its Tailored Sustainable Connected 4.0 strategy. Through a thoughtful combination of people, process and technology, Schneider developed unique supply chains built around the unique needs of its varied customer base. Schneider has proven adept at designing and executing these supply chains in a way that is both good for the company and good for the planet, leveraging a connected technology infrastructure.

Beyond internal results, Schneider is proving to be an effective ecosystem developer. Through its EcoStruxure platform, the firm has harnessed its unique role in the infrastructure value chain to build a coalition of partners focused on innovation in electricity management.

Schneider carries this same theme through to advancing the practice of supply chain more broadly. A simple search for “Schneider Supply Chain” reveals the firm’s openness and readiness to share what has made it successful.
Nestlé

Strong community perception and a perfect ESG score secured the No. 5 spot in the Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 for 2021 for Nestlé, two years’ running.

Over the past year Nestlé made significant investment in transforming the global supply chain with focus on adapting to new business models and improving end-to-end planning.

- Demonstrated strength in ESG and leadership in the supply chain community
- Invested in reducing packaging waste via R&D, product manufacturing and product design
- Successfully adapted to new business models and improved end-to-end supply chain planning

Specifically, Nestlé is building scalable e-commerce and direct-to-consumer (DTC) capabilities across the entire supply chain, including product and packaging customization, agile fulfillment services and last-mile delivery capabilities.

To address packaging waste, Nestlé’s global R&D network and Institute of Packaging Sciences are developing refillable and reusable solutions, simplified packaging and biodegradable and compostable materials, while increasing the use of recycled content.

During 2020, Nestlé further expanded the use of recyclable paper packaging and recycled content across its portfolio and piloted several new refillable and reusable systems.

And this year, to reduce plastic packaging, Nestlé switched to recyclable paper packaging for all Smarties products. This alone will eliminate more than 400 metric tons of plastic packaging annually.
Intel

The world going virtual in 2020 drove demand higher for Intel's microprocessors. Now in 2021, the chip giant ranks No. 6 in the Gartner Supply Chain Top 25, climbing two spots.

- Demonstrated strength in ESG, product planning and operational efficiency
- Announced significant investments in manufacturing infrastructure/capability and sustainability
- Made continued strides in collaborating closely with customers and the supplier ecosystem

Intel continues to drive customer centricity: Increased collaboration with customers helps in understanding critical capabilities, aligning the supplier ecosystem and reaching upstream to design-in requirements as part of the product planning process.

And with the advent of a new CEO, Intel has vigor in priorities like product execution and delivery, innovation leadership, modernizing the manufacturing model and leading with purpose. It unveiled an ambitious bid to regain its manufacturing lead by spending billions of dollars on new factories and creating a foundry business that will make chips for other companies.

Intel has always had a strong ESG effort, with its RISE (responsible, inclusive, sustainable, enabling) strategy delivering a perfect ESG score of 10 this year. One ambitious plan is to create “the most sustainable and energy-efficient PC in the world — one that eliminates carbon, water and waste in its design and use.”
Food and beverage leader PepsiCo ranks No. 7 in the Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 for 2021.

PepsiCo is increasingly focused on investing in digital tools and advanced technologies to create a more efficient, streamlined supply chain.

- Demonstrated leadership and innovation in both e-commerce and the direct store delivery model
- Increased investment in digital tools and advanced technologies
- Launched two DTC offerings and the first fully integrated SmartLabel management platform

For example, when the COVID-19 global pandemic accelerated the growth of e-commerce, PepsiCo leveraged its existing B2B e-commerce fulfillment platform to successfully launch two direct-to-consumer (DTC) offerings within 30 days. Pantryshop.com and Snacks.com allow consumers to order customized assortments of PepsiCo products.

Additionally, PepsiCo's collaboration with Scanbuy yielded the first fully integrated SmartLabel management platform. SmartLabel enables PepsiCo to "deliver the level of transparency their consumers expect today and into the future."

PepsiCo is also continuing to pilot the digital watermark initiative to drive increased recycling in Europe through the "Holy Grail" consortium.

And still PepsiCo's direct store delivery (DSD) program is an integrated system that continues to differentiate its supply chain by connecting manufacturing, distribution and go-to-market activities seamlessly to the store shelf.
Walmart

Retail giant Walmart ranks No. 8 in the Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 for 2021. The world’s largest physical retailer vaulted into the top 10 for the first time in five years.

Made continued strides toward achieving ambitious sustainability goals via close partnership with suppliers and technology investments

Announced plans for $14 billion in capex investments to improve online order efficiency

Launched Walmart+ to advance toward an integrated supply chain across digital and physical channels

Walmart’s move toward an integrated supply chain across digital and physical channels continues at pace. This was highlighted over the past 12 months by the launch of Walmart+, a new membership-based program that competes directly with Amazon Prime, offering unlimited free delivery from across Walmart’s network of more than 4,700 stores.

To support Walmart+ and other efforts, the business announced plans for $14 billion in capex investments — including ramping up automated micro-fulfillment centers — to achieve more efficient picking and packing of online orders.

Walmart is also making significant investments in sustainability initiatives, with plans announced to achieve zero emissions across the business’ global operations by 2040 without carbon offsets. To achieve this goal, Walmart’s supply chain is partnering extensively with suppliers and has, since 2017, avoided more than 230 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions while installing more solar energy power generation than any other company in the United States.
L’Oréal ranks No. 9 in the Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 for 2021. This is the first time that L’Oréal has entered the top 10.

Continued global leadership in key corporate social responsibility (CSR) measures

Made significant investments in digital technology to increase supply chain resilience and agility as well as customer benefits

Demonstrated supply chain leadership from order management to delivery

L’Oréal has been accelerating supply chain transformation with focus on three key areas:

- **Agile Beauty:** Adapt the supply chain to reflect current and future needs to allow more agility. This includes developing a more robust S&OP process and investing in data analytics and demand-sensing capabilities.

- **Service Beauty:** Revamp the operating model and invest in logistics to meet evolving consumer needs. This includes a fulfillment factory program with an automated and data-driven distribution center that offers a wide range of value-added services including personalization and traceability.

- **Digital Beauty:** Provide leadership from order management to delivery in order to both address emerging needs stemming from the exponential growth of e-commerce and direct to consumer (DTC) and ensure a positive customer experience.

L’Oréal continues to boast a strong CSR record, being the only company to rate Triple A in the client data protection (CDP) ratings four years in a row. L’Oréal was also one of 16 consumer products companies included in Ethisphere Institute’s 2021 list of the World’s Most Ethical Companies.
Chinese retailer Alibaba ranks No. 10 in the Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 for 2021. The digital giant continues to significantly expand its supply chain capabilities beyond product distribution and last-mile delivery.

- Demonstrated leadership in supply chain sustainability, particularly in integrating a closed-loop recycling system into its operations
- Innovated in consumer-to-manufacturer product design to drive key manufacturing efficiencies
- Launched Alibaba.com Freight to enable real-time management of bulk ocean and air freight

In 2020 the business launched Alibaba.com Freight, a supply chain-as-a-service offering that enables small and midsize enterprises (SMEs) to instantly compare, book, manage and track bulk ocean and air freight in real time.

Consumer-to-manufacturer (C2M) product design is another area of emphasis: Alibaba utilizes shopper data to identify and aggregate demand prior to goods being produced by manufacturing partners.

Taking this a step further, Alibaba is enabling SMEs to leverage C2M insights and produce products through its digitalized end-to-end manufacturing facility in Hangzhou.

The theme of partnering with suppliers can also be seen in Alibaba’s sustainability initiatives: The Waste-Free World Initiative (a collaboration with Top 25 Master Unilever) will accelerates the process of returning high-grade plastic back into a closed-loop recycling system within China.
## Supply Chain Masters lead the way

Masters have attained top-five composite scores in the Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 for at least seven out of the last 10 years (2011-2021).

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Superior supply chains deliver on the business’s purpose

They don’t just push products; they understand customer value, invest in demand management and promote innovation against ESG. The Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 is a renowned annual ranking of the world’s superior supply chains. From financial and corporate social responsibility data and community opinion, we identify, celebrate and profile companies demonstrating excellence in supply chain management. Clients use the peer benchmarks to make the business case for supply chain transformation and the best practices to accelerate supply chain performance.

See the Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 most relevant to your geography or industry at gartner.com/en/supply-chain-top-25.