

>> 22 manufacturer relocates to seek lower wages and avoid tariffs.

"Well, Bangladesh is chaos, right?" Singleton says. "To get things from the factory to the airport, there are 15 people in the middle of that transaction that would like you to stop and pay them something."

Bourke uses an analogy: You can reserve a car, book a flight and hotel, and never talk to a single person.

"When you're shipping something from Asia to the United States, on average you're talking about 17 different touchpoints. That's 17 different opportunities for manual intervention, for

technology can better enable our staff to be more hyper-focused on the client."

While he calls technology "an enabler, at times disruptive," he adds, "It is no way the asteroid that is heading toward the earth of freight forwarders that's going to make us all extinct."

That's because technology makes 3PLs efficient, people make companies nimble.

"In reality, technology is only going to get you so far as it relates to real-time updates about what's going on" in a given locale in a given situation—or crisis, Boyrcki says. "That comes down to good old-fashioned communication."

Kuehne + Nagel has been doing that for nearly 130 years, while also innovating technologically. Its "Digitalization Roadmap" includes platforms for e-commerce international freight; advanced sea-freight that leverages big data and predictive analytics; and real-time tracking solutions customers can access on computers and smart devices.

"We strive to put the customer in the middle of everything," says Kuehne + Nagel's Brian Martin,



Brady Borycki, Vice President, Global Business Development at Wen-Parker Logistics. Photo courtesy of Wen-Parker Logistics

manual failure, for human error, weather, political situations, or work stoppages. Those will always create opportunities for obstruction."

Borycki notes: "We want to give our customers options. You can't tell someone, 'You know what? The market's a mess, the rates are up a buck a kilo, it is what it is, take it or leave it.'"

"You need to say, 'Listen, yes, there are big problems in this market at the moment, and we've got some options, alternative routings for you that might take an additional two or three days. We can hold the original costs or protect the in-DC date.'"

Given the supply chain's innate intricacies, cutting-edge tech, of course, is required.

However, Bourke notes, "Technology is not going to get rid of the complexities, but

Senior Vice President Sales & Marketing North America. "Our global Customer Relationship Management programs provide the technological

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"Some shippers are already thinking about changing their suppliers from China to countries where tariffs don't apply. But shifting is not an option for everyone."
-- Ben Bidwell, C.H. Robinson.

backbone. Our never-ending goal is to provide our customers with simple, real-time, accurate information at 'clicks away' that drive value-creating business decisions.

Through a "branch approach," Martin says, "We are committed to establishing subject matter expertise at a local level while supported with a Kuehne + Nagel global framework."

Put another way, he says, "The key is not change itself, it is the pace of change and the pace is increasing rapidly."

At the end of the day, communicating those changes is the 3PL's nonstop challenge.

"It's a fulltime job, and then

some, to be able to keep up with all the laws, regulations, changes, and challenges in the industry today, not just in North America, but globally," says Carole Cirino, Director of International Logistics Services at APL Logistics. "If there's something happening in transportation, chances are we have experienced it and have come up with a solution around it. We also have really good working relationships with partners and vendors, and we rely on them to help provide us with information and solutions."

Along with technology, she says, "We comb the trade journals and expect to be informed by companies like Freight Business Journal to give us insight as to trends and issues to prepare the right solutions at the right time."

To state the obvious, clients' in-house demands change, too.

"Our customers are always asking for something new, something to solve their problems," says Kevin Springer, Vice President of Sales at SMC3. "We serve 75% of the top Fortune 500 companies, along with a myriad of smaller shippers. We have direct relationships with these customers."

In the LTL spot market, for instance, SMC3 helps customers automate APIs that work with carriers.

He cites eShipping, an early

Spotlight on 3PL Customer Relations and Performance Report

Steve Kitterman talks about lighting fixtures shipped from the West Coast to a job site in the Northeast. Upon arrival, though, it turns out construction's delayed; the shipment must be held three weeks. His company, UCW Logistics, quickly arranges for its partner carrier to drop the trailer until the fixtures can be installed.

"We spot opportunities that sometimes the customer doesn't see," he says, noting that UCW works hand-in-glove with carriers—sometimes independent owner-operators—as well as their customers.

Citing another example, Kitterman mentions a shipper loading the wrong freight, a malfunction requiring equally deft customer service.

"Customers make mistakes. We all do. We just try to help them mitigate that. We're an extension of them," says Kitterman, UCW's Chief Commercial Officer.

Just this October, Armstrong & Armstrong, a market-research firm

founded in 1980, released Third-Party Logistics Brand Recognition, a survey prepared every five years that ranks 3PLs on their customer-relations performance.

"The key thing is to form a relationship that's very open," says Chairman Dick Armstrong, who has been in the logistics business 54 years. "Companies have to have the sophistication and the inclination to get the job done."

The leaderboard this year:

- DHL/Exel
- XPO
- C.H. Robinson
- UPS/Coyote
- Kuehne + Nagel

UCW, founded in 1925 and operating throughout North America and into Canada and Mexico, may not appear on such a list, but still works from the same principles global firms do: establishing a reliable supply chain of information.

Says Kitterman: "We pride ourselves on communication and constant communication."
-- John Jeter.

user of the company's API needed to automate dispatch platform. The company's CEO, and shipment tracking. Chad Earwood, told SMC3 he "He predicted that with the

"Our customers are always asking for something new, something to solve their problems."
-- John Singleton, Wen-Parker Logistics.



help of our APIs, he could see a 20% reduction in work hours spent on tracking and a 30% decrease in dispatch tasks," Springer says. "For us, it's all about being in front of the customer. It's spending time with our existing customers and talking to new ones. We're very relationship-driven."

Says Singleton: "It goes back to expectation with your customer, and you've got to be communicating with them."