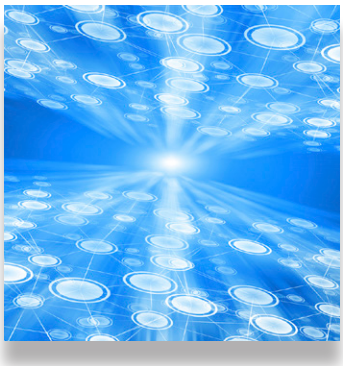
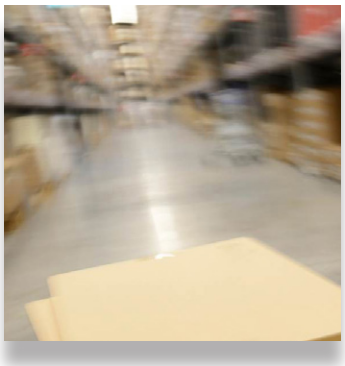
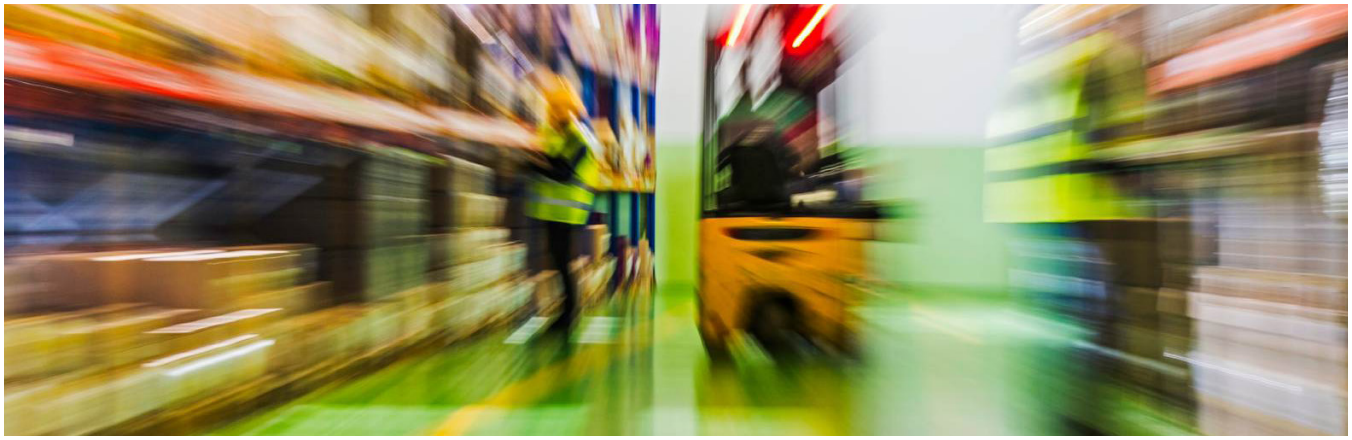




WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN SELECTING A SUPPLY CHAIN PLANNING PLATFORM

A Handy Guide To Help You Choose The Best Platform For Your Needs



Choosing the Best Platform for Your Needs

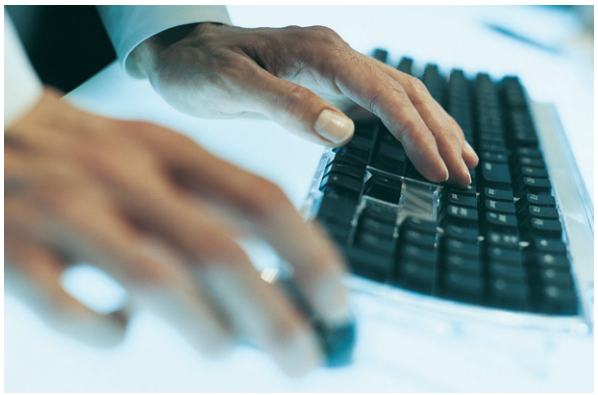
Supply chain planning used to be a lot easier, but with today's world of global sourcing and an almost infinite array of paths from the source to the customer, the complexity is daunting. That's why today's supply chain planning systems cover everything from production, transportation, sales and operations (S&OP), to replenishment planning and much more. Planning solutions are expected to be able to solve a dizzying array of planning challenges that businesses face every day, and yet be flexible enough to accommodate the diverse requirements of users from across an expanse of industries.

Organizations considering buying or replacing their planning systems should be aware of the range of features available today and how each might contribute to the overall effectiveness of their supply chains and, most importantly, how each aligns with their business needs. You may not need every feature a platform offers today, or want to pay for those features before you actually need them, but don't eliminate the possibility that you might as your business grows and becomes more complex.

As you review these capabilities, identify your highest priority needs based on the optimization impact each capability might represent and the relative necessity based on your situation.

Platform Features Available Today

Multiple-user functionality. Historically, businesses looked at processes in silos – from production to inventory to distribution – despite the fact that most are deeply intertwined. This was primarily due to technological limitations as well as a rigid organizational design. Planning in siloed systems is sub-optimal and partial. This realization has pushed today's supply chain management leaders to view their supply chains holistically and increasingly push for syncing diverse planning systems. A comprehensive supply chain planning system today needs to be able to cover the planning needs of users from different departments within a company. Therefore, a multi-user system that allows for close collaboration, linking, and analytics between users at different departments is going to be the most practical for most businesses.



Single data model. If a planning system has to support multiple user functionality, it needs to be designed and maintained in a single data mode to support users with different needs, while reducing the data integration and conversion requirements that add processing time and operating costs.

Easy data interface with ERP or other systems. A planning system provides intelligent and actionable plans to the users, typically through mathematical optimization, that allow them to make smarter business decisions. Planning systems require data – and a lot of it – on which to build and derive the business intelligence from which it can make actionable plans for users. In order to efficiently use the planning system, it must be easy for that system to interface with a company's data sources, typically an ERP or an SQL database, with communication running both ways.

On-the-fly, what-if analysis. Planning systems need to give users the ability to easily consider multiple options and contingencies through what-if analyses. Business decisions aren't made considering only one scenario; examining alternatives allows managers to see tradeoffs and various risk/reward possibilities to arrive at solutions that fit them best. Your planning system must be equipped to support these kinds of analyses day-in and day-out, without requiring additional data inputs and support.

Aggregate levels usage. Look for a planning system that provides the ability to aggregate at any level users need, with functionality that allows aggregated levels to be easily introduced to the system to accommodate changing business environments. This helps ensure that a single planning system is being consistently used across your organization – from individual store managers looking at store-level data to a VP of Marketing looking to aggregate national sales data.

Guide

Built-in reports/graphs/maps. The primary purpose of a planning system is to help users make better decisions. In order to achieve this, planning systems must have the features that allow users to create custom reports, graphs or maps easily. It is often through these visuals that supply chain managers gain valuable insights to the problems they face and develop intelligent prognosis for their challenges.

Optimization and heuristics. Optimization analytics are often good for everyday business problems. But when supply chain problems become larger and complex, the performance of pure optimization suffers. In these instances, an approach based on heuristics and optimization is more appropriate. Therefore, a good planning systems needs to provide both optimization and heuristics.

Web-based access. If you'll likely have multiple users in different regions, the planning system should be available at all times. In addition, users should be able to access the planning system with a common Internet browser from a range of desktop and mobile devices. With a common browser, users don't need to have any additional system installed, reducing the need for maintenance and support staff.

As you search for the most appropriate system for your needs, keep all of these functionalities in mind, in a priority order that matches your situation, both now and down the road. Getting the most benefit from the system requires alignment between these features and your needs. If the system you're currently using falls short of this list, it might be time to rethink the planning system you're using.

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SOLVOYO

Global Headquarters
77 Franklin Street
Suite 504
Boston, MA 02110
Main: +1 617 642 1338
Fax: +1 800 617 3880
For more information, please contact
info@solvoyo.com
www.solvoyo.com

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