Marken's Dan Bell Reveals 3 Ways Real-Time Data is Reshaping the Life Sciences Supply Chain

The pharmaceutical supply chain operates in an environment of unmatched complexity. No one understands this better than Dan Bell, Senior Vice President of Innovation & Strategic Operations at Marken, a subsidiary of UPS Healthcare.

While Bell has 20+ years of experience across cold chain, drug distribution, drug supply, clinical supply chain, and commercial supply chain, his true passion lies in supply chain innovation. In his recent Orchestrating Outcomes interview, Bell shared insights that underscore why now is the time for the industry to revisit how things are done, what can be done better, and how technology offers a path forward to a digitalized future.

This article looks at three key insights shared by Bell and explores their implications for supply chain leaders.

1. Supply chain data is meaningless without meaningful application

While supply chain visibility tools and data capture devices have proliferated, Bell points out one persistent challenge that the life sciences industry has struggled with: meaningful application of collected data.

"Data for data's sake really is just data at the end of the day," Bell remarked,

emphasizing the need for systems, processes, and workflows for operationalizing supply chain data to mitigate risks and plan proactively.

One of the most pressing issues preventing this data from being used more effectively is the industry's continued reliance on manual workflows for exchanging critical supply chain data and transactions. If critical information is trapped in portals, dashboards, and spreadsheets at one company, other trading partners in the broader supply network are limited in how they can operationalize this data for their own benefit. This leads to supply chain planning delays and operational disruptions that impact the entire supply chain.

"A lot of people have dashboards that give critical information—where is the product, what's happening to it, is it on time, is it moving the way we want it to move," Bell explained. "But you also need to be able to relay that information to interested parties and stakeholders outside your organization."

Enabling real-time data exchange across entire supply chains, and not just a handful of the biggest players, is critical for bridging this gap and delivering actionable insights for better decision-making—both within your four walls and to your upstream and downstream partners.

2. The demand for greater precision can only be met by broader integration

Another revelation was the importance of interconnected systems for driving the precision demanded by today's complex global supply chains.

Increasingly, life sciences and healthcare companies turn to organizations like Marken for its wide breadth of clinical and advanced therapy logistics services and expertise. Tighter system integration with a broader number of supply chain partners enables the flow of real-time supply chain information that helps Marken ensure the performance of its supply chain when the organization is handling sensitive clinical materials.

“For the advanced therapies, you only get one chance to get it right,“ Bell explains. “And so the logistics and the orchestration, the challenge is around being super precise and realizing that there is no room given for error because there's no opportunity to just go and make some more.”

But how can companies get access to and share the real-time supply chain data that enables this precision? According to Bell, that’s where making the right investments into scalable technology and IT expertise can provide a path forward, creating a supply chain network that empowers the flow of information and ensures the right information arrives alongside (or even preceding) the product.

“We think of ourselves as an IT company, not a logistics company, because so much of what we do is both dependent on and driven by the IT element of our business,” he explained. “We start looking at the data flows, there's one overarching element that we have to pay attention to—and that's how systems talk to each other. It’s about interconnectedness.”

3. AI can transform exception management but it needs real-time data

When asked about which key performance indicators Marken’s customers focus on, one insight Bell shared is that the industry is paying more attention to exceptions. Many companies in the life sciences and pharmaceutical space generate a tremendous amount of data on supply chain movement, but being able to separate out which events may lead to catastrophes from the noise of everyday operations is still elusive.

Bell underscored the transformative potential of AI for investigating exceptions—but it needs real-time, accurate supply chain data to be successful. Supply chain digitalization initiatives that foster seamless, scalable data exchange across all partners lay the foundation for advanced AI projects.

By making critical transaction data easily accessible, supply chain leaders can identify the root causes of disruptions quickly, predict future risks, and enhance

operational efficiency. “AI can help you be very efficient,” Dan explained, emphasizing the value of real-time data collection for creating actionable timelines and insights.

With data flowing from all partners directly to key enterprise systems, AI becomes a powerful tool, fueling everything from automated exception handling to precision planning for dock scheduling and labor assignments.

Unleash the value of the data flowing through your supply chain

Bell’s insights affirm a clear takeaway for supply chain leaders: end-to-end visibility across all partners is no longer a luxury but a necessity. The ability to exchange supply chain transactions with your entire supply network is critical to gaining the real-time upstream and downstream visibility required for better decision making and operational efficiency.

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- Fueling business growth by leveraging critical supply chain data for AI strategies.

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