

# Supply chain visibility: An imperative for transportation service providers



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## Introduction

Globalization, competition, and consistently evolving consumer demand nudged customers towards the expansion of their supplier networks. Although technology may be the enabler, escalating expectations of customers are the real stimulus behind this. According to a survey by Gartner, 80% of supply chain professionals specify that they plan to increase their logistics outsourcing budget, which goes beyond warehousing and fulfillment.

A supply chain is a complex orchestration of people, places, and things. Transportation service & logistics providers (TSLs) include services, such as freight, land, ocean & air, truckload, and LTL operators. TSLs can be involved in motor freight transportation, warehousing, water transportation, transportation by air, and even railroad transportation.

Beyond ordinary transportation services are Intermodal transportation, third party logistics (3PL), and fourth-party logistics (4PL), which take 3PL a bit further by managing technology, resources, infrastructure, and occasionally other third-party logistics providers. A visible and transparent supply chain is missing from all types of transportation service providers.



## Complexities and Hindrances

For starters, transaction formats vary among both partners and transactions; there is a wide array of variations across ocean freight, intermodal rail transportation, 3PL breakbulk operations, truckload and LTL carriers, warehouse operations, and 'last mile.'

On the surface, truckload and LTL appear similar; however, they are far from aligned. Ocean, rail, and intermodal transportation are just as disparate, and there are huge differences between 3PL, 4PL, and Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) yet they often work together. However, since enterprise-level systems in these areas of transportation service are just as specialized, collaboration on a common platform is just not tenable.

The differences among TSLs result in inconsistencies; the flow of event information across various partnerships is uneven and collaboration is challenging. The result is a tedious and seldom integrated partner-to-partner relationship that is highly dependent on human intervention at every turn. If you have spent any time in transportation during your career and you are reading this, you are probably nodding your head at the moment.

## Today is Different

What is different today is not the mechanism by which transportation service providers talk to one another beyond FTP, X12, flat files, APIs, and XML, but how those transactions are exchanged, stored, and used within the communication platform that exchanges them.

## Overcoming Challenges

Transportation service & logistics providers (TSLs) who find themselves with multiple EDI solutions are particularly vulnerable to business interruptions. To put it simply, when something goes sideways and it does from time to time, how do you get it under control? How can you keep your business functional let alone advance your operational capacity?

Multiple solutions mean more complications, more upgrades, and yes, more interruptions. It also means less time spent focusing on the tasks at hand and more time and resources on applications, cross-training, and 'back-up' planning just to keep achieve consistent outcomes and boost productivity.

PartnerLinQ by Visionet is an end-to-end digital connectivity platform purpose-built for your growing enterprise that puts you in complete control of your business by providing increased flexibility, full visibility, and deep integration across your TSL network.

This intuitive and flexible solution backed by Visionet Systems and 25 years of integration expertise empowers supply chain enterprises of all sizes to effortlessly overcome the most prevalent challenges of the transportation service & logistics provider industry.



## Transportation

Companies should be able to transport the messages efficiently. While VANs may be the most dominant facilitator of B2B communication, the AS2 protocol helped dramatically reduce operational expenditures on data exchange. PartnerLinQ includes an AS2 solution within its transportation layer, which allows partners to securely exchange EDI transactions without having to worry about per document fees. It also includes an FTP and SFTP solution, so there is nothing else to buy, it is all in there.

## Transformation

The goal of transformation is to convert what your partner sends into something understandable at your end. For example, orange producers and traditional grocery stores may speak the same language. Look carefully, and you'll find that although a company selling groceries and one manufacturing electronics often use the same TSLs, their transaction formats would often be entirely different.

PartnerLinQ includes a transformation engine and a message processor, which is where EDI trade messages are transformed into messaging that your ERP system understands and delivers that message to the core with a Common Processing Workflow. PartnerLinQ integrates natively with most ERP, TMS, and WMS systems with its ERP Integration Framework and Microservices, eliminating the need for data transformation by way of interim documents – and since we like to make things easy, we also have the ability within the ERP Integration Framework to accommodate the existing processes in your environment.



## Visibility, Transparency, & Transaction Analysis

Remaining agile and relevant amidst continuously shifting markets and trends means a commitment to evolve. Supply chain executives are emphasizing visibility throughout the supply chain, and are increasingly relying on transportation service & logistics providers (TSLs) for real-time and insightful data.

In an earlier time, availability dictated edge over competitors; today that requirement has grown to include visibility. Visibility is the top-funded initiative according to Gartner's Supply Chain User Wants and Needs Survey. TSLs witness a growing need for solutions engineered with visibility, robust connectivity, and advanced analytics.

PartnerLinQ provides a holistic view of your integration, leading to an enhanced customer experience. It focuses on success, which helps your team separate, detect, and eliminate errors. It has built-in monitoring which begins with the Home Screen as your users log in. This simple yet intuitive Home Screen dashboard allows the user to view inbound and outbound transactions in flight simply by logging in – and when the volumes are large, just refresh the screen for a fresh look.

Transaction and Error Analytics are also included with PartnerLinQ, which ensure speedy identification and remediation of trending errors. There is no more digging through error logs or folders to find your transactions; they are just a click away with PartnerLinQ.



## Business Rules Management

To keep the supply chain moving, across borders, by air, land, or sea, your value chain should streamline your operation, not get in the way. Collaboration among parties often means juggling a wide variety of requirements. PartnerLinQ simplifies collaboration by enabling one-to-many trading relationships through the Common Processing Workflow complemented by the Business Rule Manager, which streamlines partner requirements and relationships further still.



## Integration

The integration of suppliers, manufacturers, customers, and other partners relies on seamless visibility to improve supply chain performance. PartnerLinQ's ERP integration framework connects directly with your TMS, WMS, ERP, and eCommerce platform eliminating multiple integrations, manual and secondary processing, and enabling messaging which can be consumed without the need for intervention.

## Alerts & Actionable Events

A treasure trove of information resides within a transportation services provider. By leveraging the right tools and metrics, you can monitor the health of your providers and supply chain. With the help of interactive BI dashboards, you can view significant and insightful KPIs, issues within the chain, and trend analysis. Built-in analytics enable real-time error detection, keeping all the responsible stakeholders informed and notified with alerts.

PartnerLinQ's alert management capabilities allow users to be quickly alerted to the incursion to take immediate action when a transaction encounters a business rule identified in the Business Rule Manager.



## Conclusion

Transportation service & logistics providers (TSLs) rely on various data formats, communication standards, and integration methodologies to enable communication and connectivity, which often leads to a complex mesh of networks and integrations. PartnerLinQ is a frictionless digital connectivity platform that provides visibility across your entire supply chain ecosystem; simply put, it is integration without complication. Talk to our experts to empower a visible and transparent supply chain for your organization.

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