

First Thoughts

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Best New Supply Chain and Logistics Products of the Past Year

For the second year in a row, we're going to review the best new products in supply chain, logistics and related areas that we saw announced roughly in the 2008 calendar year. Alright, it's a bit late for this, but we've had a busy start for the year, and this is the first time I have had an open week to get this in.

Some caveats: First, we certainly didn't see everything, and may certainly have missed many excellent new products. As with last year, if you have something to submit here, sort of after the fact, send some information to us at the Feedback button below.

Second, the process, in a sense, tends to have a bit of a bias towards new companies and or truly new products and, as a result of that, a bit of a software bias as well; it's just hard to get too excited for "extensions" or improvements to existing products, especially in the hardware area, even if many of those incremental enhancements add a lot of value to customers.

Third, this is just totally subjective based on what struck me, and others of course may have very different opinions. Fourth, we haven't really followed up to see how these products are working in actual deployments; often, the reality does not match the potential.

All that said, here is my list:

Software

Smart Turn on-demand Warehouse Management System: The on-demand WMS market has been slow to take off, and there are several other on-demand offerings on the market, but Smart Turn has a unique approach in two areas: (1) its very low and straightforward pricing model, and (2) its strategy of trying to convince many companies, not only traditional distribution centers, that they should look for all the places they have inventory and try to increase their level of visibility and control over it. Think restaurant chains, hotels, service parts, MRO, retail store rooms, etc. – many areas where there is still much manual tracking of what inventory is where and how much is being consumed.

ILOG's carbon network design software incorporating carbon emissions calculations: ILOG, now part of IBM, released a new version of its network planning and optimization software in 2008 that took a very rigorous approach to adding Sustainability factors into the network design analysis. While there have been a number of companies announcing "carbon calculators" of one form or another, many of those are pretty "light." Conversely, ILOG has created a very robust solution. Unquestionably Sustainability and carbon emissions will be increasingly important factors in network design decisions, and needs now to be explicitly modeled, which this product does.

Amitive's cross enterprise supply chain planning software: a spin-off of Japanese industrial giant **Mitsui**, Amitive released a new product targeted at a growing supply chain market – how to plan and manage across an increasingly outsourced manufacturing environment. There is general agreement that many existing ERP and APS modules do not handle this well. We liked the multi-level visibility, the ability to consider capacity and constraints in a way tailored to an outsourced environment, and other tools geared specifically to planning and execution in an outsourced model.

JDA Software's new Planogram Generator product: What most struck me is that in addition to increasing the automation of this sometimes manual effort of setting store shelf and merchandising plans, the product better connects the plan to execution and store-specific requirements and constraints, and enables the plans to be rapidly changed based on fluctuations in supply and demand. This is a good example of the increasing integration of planning and execution in the consumer goods-to-retail supply chain. We will generally compliment JDA for a slew of new product releases in 2008.

HighJump Software's new program designed to deliver a WMS implementation in just 45 days. For the program, HighJump uses what it calls a structured "playbook" implementation methodology and a "Warehouse Wizard" tool to speed system set-up and configuration. Reducing the time and cost of WMS implementations would be a very good thing for many.

Gilmore Says:

☞ Sustainability and carbon emissions will be increasingly important factors in network design decisions, and needs now to be explicitly modeled. ☞

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Softeon's Cross Dock solution: This supply chain execution software company released a new cross dock solution specifically geared to meet the needs of import warehouses and third party logistics hubs. It nicely simplifies what can be a complex process, and supports full cross dock operations, "DC Bypass" and related functions, as well as complex container building on the outbound side.

I will note that a number of software companies released solutions for dealing with the new "10+2" import filing requirements, so many so that it was hard to really identify any that really stood out.

Hardware/Material Handling:

Seegrid's industrial robots: We liked the new "industrial robots" announced early in 2008 by Seegrid for moving materials in distribution and manufacturing applications. As we've written, this is part of an overall major trend towards increased robotics in materials handling, and what distinguished the Seegrid product is an innovative approach to using optics for guiding the vehicles, reducing cost and increasing flexibility versus traditional Automated Guided Vehicles (AGVs).

I also liked a new pick-to-light system from a company called **Wesley International**, which seems to have spun this effort off from its core material handling business as a new unit called **Alexa**. A few things make it different. The lights can be flexibly mounted on existing storage racks – which means you could outfit some locations with lights (e.g., fast moving SKUs), but use bar code or voice picking for others. Interestingly, the light displays are controlled from the operators' handheld devices and pick carts through an infrared connection, not a separate computer tied directly to the lights. These wireless terminals can also be used for voice/bar code picking as needed for the non-lighted locations, and also provides some flexibility in how batching of picks and puts are used.

RFID:

Like others, we liked the new RFID reader from **Mojix**. The company released in 2008 a new RFID reader with super-sensitivity, which combined with a network of "exciters" around a facility can enable a company to operate with as few as one actual reader in the building, and have "passive" tags operate more like "active" ones.

Lowry Computer Product's food safety application: This systems integrator released an end-to-end tracking system that uses wireless, RFID, bar coding and other tools to improve the traceability and visibility of the food supply chain from farm to store shelf, and has implemented the solution at one food manufacturing, starting the tagging process literally "in the field." Others can probably do this too, but I don't think anyone else has targeted the problem in the same way, and obviously this is a growing issue that technology can clearly help address.

Consultants:

We are very impressed with the new Supply Chain blog by **Infosys**, the global consultant and systems giant out of India. There are many supply chain blogs out there, but frankly, too many don't say a whole lot, or just summarize what someone else said. The Infosys blog is quite good, featuring a number of contributors and original thought, and they have nicely organized it around the SCORE model processes: Plan, Buy, Make, Deliver, Return. Definitely worth giving it a read.

That's my list. Our apologies to any noteworthy products that we missed. You can make your case at the Feedback button below.

Did you see any noteworthy new products released in the past year that we missed? Any on our list especially seem noteworthy to you? Let us know your thoughts at the Feedback button below.

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