# 2026 15 MATERIAL HANDLING BUSINESS TRENDS

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1 **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**
The workforce landscape is rapidly evolving as AI-driven technologies automate processes, optimize labor, enhance decision-making, increase cyber security risks and set new benchmarks for operational excellence.

2 **GEOPOLITICS**
An increasingly volatile international trade environment is disrupting global markets, supply chains, commodity pricing and impacting business decision making.

3 **CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS**
Rising customer expectations and cost reduction initiatives are creating margin pressure and challenging traditional business models to offer additional value.

4 **WORKFORCE DYNAMICS**
Changing workforce dynamics are reshaping expectations with companies facing challenges in aligning performance, accountability, and engagement.

5 **TALENT GAP**
The growing skills gap is making it increasingly difficult to find and retain qualified talent, challenging companies to invest more in training, upskilling, and workforce development.

6 **WORKPLACE SAFETY**
Workplace safety programs that include proactive risk management to protect people and operations are being required by customers and expected by employees.

7 **CONSOLIDATION**
Industry consolidation is accelerating, as private equity firms, manufacturers, and distributors pursue acquisitions, intensifying competition and reshaping the market landscape.

8 **CONTRACT REQUIREMENTS**
Customers and suppliers are increasingly requiring more stringent contracts with complex terms and conditions.

9 **COMPETITION**
The systems integrators and storage and handling segments have increased pressures from other industries entering the market.

10 **CYBER SECURITY**
Heightened cybersecurity risks are impacting companies' ability to safeguard sensitive data and to ensure customer trust, supply chain continuity and business stability.

11 **ECOMMERCE**
A rapidly growing number of customers, including next-generation buyers, are shifting to online platforms to research and purchase products.

12 **PERMITTING**
Requirements continue to increase for state and local permitting as well as contractor licensing.

13 **EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES**
Emerging technologies are pushing companies to rapidly integrate tech-driven solutions into traditional applications, increasing the importance of supplier partnerships.

14 **AUTOMATION SOLUTIONS**
Customers are increasingly requesting phased automation strategies that offer measurable returns at each stage—driving demand for flexible, modular solutions that can adapt or scale over time.

15 **PARTNERSHIPS**
Strategic partnerships between manufacturers and distributors are more important than ever as demand for direct consumer business increases.

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