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2026 15 MATERIAL HANDLING BUSINESS TRENDS

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

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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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