



2026 MATERIAL HANDLING BUSINESS TRENDS

Discussion Questions

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.

- A. How are you currently using AI in your business, and where do you see the greatest untapped opportunities?
- B. What challenges have you faced integrating AI into existing processes or systems?
- C. How are you preparing your workforce to adapt and thrive as AI becomes part of everyday operations?
- D. How are you balancing the use of AI with the need to preserve critical thinking, creativity, and human judgment in your business?

2. Geopolitics

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

- A. How has global trade volatility influenced your supply chain and procurement strategies?
- B. What steps are you taking to reduce exposure from geopolitical instability?
- C. Are you changing your customer or market mix due to geopolitical factors?
- D. What information sources have you found most useful in understanding and responding to global market disruptions?

3. Customer Expectations

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

- A. How have customer expectations changed in the past year, and how are you adapting?
- B. What strategies are you using to provide additional value without eroding margins?
- C. How are you gathering and using customer feedback to shape your strategy or create new value for customers?
- D. How are you rethinking customer commitments or service models to stay competitive?
- E. What role does technology play in meeting and exceeding customer expectations?



4. Workforce Dynamics

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

- A. How have you adjusted your leadership and communication style to meet changing workforce expectations?
- B. What strategies are you using to improve employee engagement?
- C. How are you maintaining or improving employee accountability while adapting to new ways of working?
- D. How are you addressing generational differences in work styles and values?
- E. How are you measuring performance in today's evolving work environment?

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.

- A. Where are you experiencing the most significant skills shortages?
- B. What training or upskilling programs are you implementing to address gaps in your workforce?
- C. How are you attracting talent in a highly competitive labor market?
- D. How are you building new pipelines for talent, whether through schools, trade programs, or non-traditional sources?
- E. How are you creating engagement or growth opportunities to keep your best people from seeking new opportunities?

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.

- A. How are you ensuring safety programs meet both regulatory and employee expectations?
- B. What proactive risk management practices have you found most effective?
- C. How do you train new employees to prioritize safety from day one?
- D. How are you integrating safety into broader operational goals rather than treating it as a standalone program?
- E. What role does technology play in enhancing workplace safety?



7. Consolidation

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

- A. How has industry consolidation affected your competitive landscape?
- B. How are you differentiating your business to stay competitive as consolidation reshapes the market?
- C. What opportunities has consolidation created for your business?
- D. How has consolidation impacted customer relationships and service expectations?

8. Contract Requirements

Customers and suppliers are increasingly requiring more stringent contracts with complex terms and conditions.

- A. What strategies are you using to negotiate more favorable terms?
- B. How are you identifying and managing risk as contracts become more complex?
- C. How are you training your team to understand and comply with contract obligations?
- D. How do you decide when to walk away from a contract?

9. Competition

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

- A. How are new entrants from other industries impacting your market share or customer relationships?
- B. What differentiators are you leveraging to stay competitive?
- C. How do you track and respond to competitive threats?
- D. How are you adapting service or product strategies to stay ahead of competitors?
- E. What role does branding and reputation play in winning business?

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.

- A. How are you addressing the increased cybersecurity risks that come with AI adoption?
- B. How do you currently assess and manage cybersecurity risks?
- C. What policies or training have you implemented to protect sensitive data?
- D. How do you balance security measures with operational efficiency?
- E. How do you evaluate the cybersecurity practices of vendors and partners?
- F. What contingency plans do you have for a cyberattack or data breach?



11. Ecommerce

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

- A. How has the shift to online purchasing impacted your sales strategy?
- B. What digital tools or platforms have been most effective for reaching and engaging customers?
- C. How are you managing product and service presentation online compared to traditional channels?
- D. What challenges have you faced integrating ecommerce with your existing operations?
- E. How are you preparing for next-generation buyers who expect seamless digital experiences?

12. Permitting

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

- A. How have changes in permitting and licensing requirements impacted your projects?
- B. What approaches have helped your team navigate compliance with local and state regulations?
- C. How do you stay up to date on evolving requirements across multiple jurisdictions?
- D. How are you leveraging partnerships or consultants to navigate the permitting process?
- E. How do you plan for or mitigate delays caused by permitting?

13. Emerging Technologies

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

- A. What emerging technologies do you see having the greatest impact on your business and your customers?
- B. How do you determine when a new technology is ready for investment or integration into your business?
- C. How are you working with suppliers to integrate new tech into your offerings?
- D. What challenges are you faced when blending traditional and new solutions?
- E. How are you training your team to adopt and leverage emerging technologies?



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 overtime.

- A. How have you approached positioning and selling phased automation solutions?
- B. What KPIs or metrics do you use to communicate the value of automation to your customers?
- C. How are you working with customers to identify and prioritize the processes best suited for automation?
- D. How are you helping customers build on early automation success while navigating to the next phase?

15. Partnerships

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

- A. How have partnerships with manufacturers or distributors helped your business adapt to market changes?
- B. How are you evaluating whether a potential partner is aligned with your strategy and values?
- C. What challenges have you faced in maintaining strong partnerships?
- D. How are you defining and measuring the ROI of partnership?
- E. How are partnerships helping you address the rise of direct-to-consumer business models?