

Data management is a cornerstone of competitive advantage in supply chain, logistics

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In logistics and the supply chain, time is money, and the market is highly competitive. If one supplier cannot deliver, customers will simply take their business elsewhere. There has subsequently been significant growth in connected devices like sensors to track goods and vehicles and analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) for more efficient route planning and delivery.

The industry has become increasingly data-driven as a source of competitive advantage. There is potential to leverage significant value from data - but only if it can be effectively managed and protected.



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Source and target

Data lies at the heart of the logistics industry – it is generated through more areas than ever before, thanks to the Internet of Things (IoT) and connected devices, and it can be hugely valuable for analytics and AI. However, if the data is not accessible, there is nothing to analyse to gain insight and the supply chain comes to a grinding halt. This makes the logistics and supply chain industry a desirable target for ransomware and other malware attacks, due to the volume and value of the data they hold.

A proper data management strategy must be put into place to ensure that the correct data is collected, that precautionary plans are in place to protect vital data, and that the strategy includes regular testing of data protection initiatives. Analytics should also be put into place to ensure that data is correct and accurate so that when it is used for insight, these insights can be trusted. The foundation of protecting and leveraging data lies in understanding what data your business relies on and where that data resides, and ultimately ensuring that the business-critical data is protected and accessible, should a data loss event occur.

Data management challenges

While data is essential, this comes with several challenges at present. Firstly, the explosion of data, from sensors on trucks and in warehouses to various software platforms means that practically everything is collecting data, which is growing at a massive rate. On top of that, once data is collected, it can be incredibly time-consuming to prepare data, identify what data there is, where it comes from, profile it, clean it and understand what value it has and even whether it needs to be kept.

Once the critical data has been identified and located, the next challenge is ensuring that the data is protected against malicious attacks or accidental deletion. Ransomware and security issues threaten the volumes of data collected, so the right security solutions need to be in place. Data must be always available, which makes an updated and well-maintained backup system essential or logistics organisations risk unauthorised access, deletion and lockout. There are also governance and compliance considerations, as personal information must be managed according to rules and regulations.

Finding the solution

There is a tendency for businesses to focus on data management infrastructure rather than the data itself, but buying more storage does not necessarily protect the data, and hoarding all data can result in unnecessary storage costs as well as compliance and security challenges. For compliance purposes, it is essential to be able to identify data and who has access to it and ensure that only relevant data is retained. This includes the ability to prove that data has been deleted from both operational and backup systems, should a customer request their data to be removed.

Data also needs to be recoverable, and data recovery needs to be responsive with minimal disruption. There are severe repercussions for businesses if data is not stored properly, including long recovery times and downtime, which result in financial loss and reputational damage. Business continuity is key, and if supported by Disaster Recovery-as-a-Service (DRaaS), returning to a fully operational state is efficient and less cost and time intensive

However, this is often a challenge to implement because there is a significant skills shortage in data management and data protection. Leveraging a relationship with specialists who understand data management can ensure that data is protected and available, effectively classified and highly available for effective disaster recovery and zero or minimal data loss.

Logistics organisations need 24/7/365 access to an expert team that knows how important it is to keep data safe from threats, and a data management partner should have suitable preventative measures in place to minimise risk. The reality is that time is money, and data is money, and it is imperative to protect data to maximise business productivity and profitability.

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