

The Supply Chain Is Not a Cost Center: Lisa Anderson Says It Can Drive Profitable Growth

Predictive planning, customer insights and smarter use of capacity can turn supply chain performance into a competitive advantage

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[Lisa Anderson, MBA, CSCP, CLTD](#), a leading expert in manufacturing strategy and supply chain transformation and president of [LMA Consulting Group, Inc.](#), is challenging executives to rethink a long-held view of the supply chain as primarily a cost center and instead consider how it can contribute directly to revenue, profitability and business value.



LMA Consulting Group celebrates 21 years

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The supply chain stops being viewed simply as something to manage at the lowest possible cost and becomes a way to create value, protect revenue and enable profitable growth.”

Lisa Anderson, President LMA Consulting Group

“Too often, supply chain conversations start with cost reduction,” said Anderson. “Certainly, controlling costs matters, but the greater opportunity is understanding how the supply chain can help the company sell more, serve customers better, respond faster and grow profitably.”

According to Anderson, the shift begins by connecting supply chain decisions to customer demand and business strategy. Companies that can anticipate what customers will need, determine the capacity and materials required to support that demand and respond faster than competitors

can turn operational capabilities into a significant business advantage.

“The supply chain touches almost everything that determines whether you can deliver on a customer promise,” Anderson explained. “Do you have the right product? Can you make it? Do you have the materials and capacity? Can you get it to the customer when they need it? If the answer is yes when your competitor’s answer is no, your supply chain is helping you win business.”

Planning for Revenue, Not Just Cost

Predictive analytics, artificial intelligence and advanced planning technologies are giving

companies greater ability to identify patterns, recognize changes in demand and evaluate potential scenarios before making decisions. However, Anderson says technology alone doesn't turn those insights into business value.

That is where [SIOPI \(Sales, Inventory & Operations Planning\)](#) becomes critical.

"SIOPI is where the revenue opportunity and the operational realities of the business come together," Anderson said. "It connects what customers are likely to need and where the business wants to grow with inventory, capacity, suppliers, people, cash and other resources required to support that growth."

Rather than viewing SIOPI simply as demand or supply planning, Anderson sees it as the framework that allows executives to evaluate opportunities across the business. What happens if demand for a product accelerates? Does the company have the capacity to respond? Are critical materials available? Where should inventory be positioned? Will additional equipment or people be required? And, most importantly, can the opportunity be pursued profitably?

"Planning isn't about loading up on inventory or adding capacity everywhere just in case," Anderson said. "It is about knowing where demand is heading and making smart decisions about where to position inventory, capacity, people and resources so you can capture the opportunity without becoming cost heavy."

When supported by predictive analytics, artificial intelligence and advanced planning tools, SIOPI can give leadership greater visibility into what is coming and the ability to model alternatives before committing resources. Better planning can also reveal where additional capacity, supplier development, automation or inventory could generate a return rather than simply add expense.

Knowing What the Customer Will Need Next

Customer knowledge is another critical part of the equation.

Historical sales remain important, but manufacturers and distributors can increasingly combine customer activity, market trends, sales intelligence, economic indicators and other data to identify changes in demand earlier.



Photo of Lisa Anderson

The objective, according to Anderson, is to move from reacting to customer orders to anticipating customer requirements.

"If you wait for the purchase order to tell you what the customer needs, you may already be too late," she said. "Companies that understand their customers, see trends developing and connect those signals to their supply chain can prepare earlier and respond faster."

That capability can translate into improved service levels, shorter lead times, greater availability and the ability to support new products, customers and markets.

Turning Supply Chain Capabilities into Business Value

Anderson believes executives should evaluate supply chain investments in terms of the business value they can create, not simply the costs they can remove.

Greater visibility can help companies respond faster. More reliable suppliers can protect revenue and customer relationships. Strategic inventory can support growth and improve service. Additional capacity can open new opportunities. Automation can increase throughput and scalability. Better planning can improve margins while reducing unnecessary working capital.

The key is understanding where supply chain capabilities intersect with what customers value and where the business intends to grow.

"An efficient supply chain that doesn't support the company's growth strategy isn't enough," Anderson said. "The goal is to build the capabilities that allow the business to take advantage of opportunities, deliver what customers value and do it profitably."

That requires supply chain leaders to be part of strategic business discussions rather than brought in after sales forecasts, customer commitments or growth plans have already been established.

"When supply chain strategy, customer demand and business strategy come together, the conversation changes," Anderson concluded. "The supply chain stops being viewed simply as something to manage at the lowest possible cost and becomes a way to create value, protect revenue and enable profitable growth."

To learn more about supply chain strategy, SIO, advanced planning and creating scalable, profitable growth, visit LMA-ConsultingGroup.com.

About LMA Consulting Group

LMA Consulting Group works with manufacturers, distributors and supply chain-related organizations to achieve predictable growth, profitable performance and scalable supply chain success. Lisa Anderson is recognized as a top supply chain and ERP expert and is regularly featured in major media, including Bloomberg, IndustryWeek, The Wall Street Journal and Inc.

Magazine. She is a noted authority on the SIOF (Sales, Inventory & Operations Planning) process and author of SIOF: Creating Predictable Revenue and EBITDA Growth. For more, visit LMA-ConsultingGroup.com.

Kathleen McEntee

Kathleen McEntee and Associates, Ltd.

+1 312-501-1950

kmcentee@kmcenteeassoc.com

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