



Once upon a time in the future...

Reuters interplanetary press report, 17th August 2177. Mari Gold, director of the intergalactic supply stream management for the largest retailer in our solar system, Shopaholics-R-us, is ready for the start of the next season: the annual, intercultural and interfaith consumer festival (formerly Christmas). This season, women's chameleon-coloured tinsel dresses produced (only) on Uranus are all the rage, whereas mobile phone ties made of pure Saturn silk are a must for men. The big craze in children's toys are telepathically controlled pet spaceships which are manufactured on Neptune.

For some time now, beaming has been the most popular and environmentally friendly means of transport. In spite of the common usage of lemon juice as fuel, spaceships are rarely used now because of their high fuel consumption. Mrs Gold speaks from experience: „Unfortunately, there are still some quality issues with free transmissions. Sending goods between secure TPs (teleports) is a routine procedure, but unsecured transportation of molecules which occurs when beaming into individual households often leads to mix-ups with astounding results. In one of our recent hypermarket deliveries, a bottle of 100-year-old malt whiskey was crossed with a bottle of baby shampoo. The recipient was not amused with his “frothy” surprise!

Science fiction or future reality?

How far away are we from this future or another one which is just as amazing? What will our supply chains look like in fifty or a hundred years' time?

Perhaps in 50 years' time, China and its neighbouring countries will be the economic giants of this world, while Europe and the USA are considered to be emerging markets. Perhaps by then we really will have discovered life on other planets. Perhaps it will then also be possible, through rapid advances in IT development, to send goods “digitally” via PCs and data networks in yottabytes.

In the meantime, the reality of supply chains looks a lot different. The world is becoming flatter, more goods are imported (particularly from Asia) and the flow of goods works well as air and sea freight capacities have aligned to accommodate the volume. However, the flow of information, documentation and money still poses a challenge. Often, the relationship between buyers and suppliers is still considered to be adversary and the free exchange of information is frequently seen as a loss of power or a negotiating disadvantage.

Collaboration and the exchange of information are the catchwords for the future, and this doesn't just apply to core suppliers, but also to their sub-suppliers. The sooner and more detailed the exchange of information between both sides, the more secure the supply chain and the lower the risk.

Yours,
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