## 2024: STEERING THROUGH THE STRAITS

CGS ANNUAL REPORT: SUPPLY CHAIN TRENDS & TECHNOLOGY



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# WELCOME

Paul Magel, President Business Applications, CGS

The pressure never really lets up in the fast-paced fashion and consumer goods world. Cost control, economic and political uncertainty, sustainability, labor and inventory management are common concerns in 2024 for retailers, brands, eCommerce businesses, manufacturers, wholesalers and their supply chain partners.

If you are reading this report, chances are your company is managing:

- SKU-intensive product portfolio
- Complex supply chain processes
- Multi-tier global supplier network
- Omnichannel fulfillment

Digital transformation has never been more important to meet customer expectations, increase sales, improve efficiency and capture business opportunities. Uncertainty might be the new normal, but that doesn't mean it has to pose an outsized threat that consistently keeps you up at night.

- Real-time visibility and connectivity across end-to-end operations
- Digital processes to replace manual, repetitive, time-consuming tasks
- Artificial intelligence-driven analytics offering new levels of insight

These are just a few supply chain trends and technologies we will discuss in this report. CGS makes it our business to keep our team and our BlueCherry<sup>®</sup> solution current with the most important industry challenges and opportunities and, more importantly, every customer's unique strategic goals. Our top priority is to be a partner in achieving 2024 objectives and building a successful future.

#### Happy reading!



## WHAT YOU WILL LEARN FROM **THIS REPORT**

For the past nine years, CGS BlueCherry<sup>®</sup> has conducted research and reported our findings in an annual Supply Chain and Technology Trends Report. Each year, hundreds of professionals from across the supply chain take time to share their perspectives. More than 300 individuals participated in our latest survey, representing multiple corporate roles and businesses active in retail, wholesale, eCommerce and manufacturing (see "About the Survey"). Here is a preview of what they shared and what we will discuss in this report.

#### 1. eCommerce:

Online sales remain the N°. 1 growth opportunity for the sixth consecutive year. Going hand in hand with this are survey participants' technology priorities. Almost 90 percent pointed to analytics, 82 percent to eCommerce and 81 percent to supply chain visibility/tracking as the top three tech priorities they either have completed, have in process or planned.

#### 2. Costs:

Price/margin pressure is the greatest supply chain challenge facing businesses this year. Fortyone percent of respondents said price pressure would be a "serious problem" in 2024, and another 46 percent expect it to pose a "moderate problem." As might be expected, reducing costs ranks the N°. 1 improvement priority for 2024. Strategies to address this include improving efficiency and productivity.

#### 3. Digital Transformation:

Companies are serious about endto-end supply chain digitalization. It's their N°. 3 growth opportunity and N°. 4 improvement priority. It's also the fourth most important thing respondents say buyers/ sourcing teams and manufacturers should collaborate on to improve 2024 supply chain performance. An impressive eighty-three percent of respondents have completed, started or are planning digital transformation actions to overcome 2024 challenges.

#### 4. Supply Chain Confidence:

A healthy majority of respondents are confident in their supply chain's ability to support their 2024 business objectives, but many see room for improvement. Only one-fourth are "highly confident" in their supply chains. The majority, 67 percent, are "moderately confident." Interestingly, that exact same share of our 2020 survey sample population -67 percent - had supply chain confidence heading into 2021, having managed to survive 2020. We'll explore what might be improving and impacting - confidence levels now.

#### 5. Sustainability/ESG:

Environmental, social and governance (ESG), the second most important growth and improvement priority heading into 2023, dropped a few notches, taking a back seat to concerns such as economic and political uncertainty. This makes sense in a presidential election year. Still, almost 60 percent of respondents said ESG is a "very important" or "important" growth opportunity. Without a doubt, ESG is now woven into the fabric of many other top business initiatives, including supply chain visibility and digital transformation.



# TRENDS & 2024 OUTLOOK

"In 2024, the industry is expected to bear the impact of fluctuations in demand that have punctuated the past few years," said the **2024 State of Fashion** report by the Business of Fashion (BoF) and McKinsey & Company. "It is during such times that supply chains experience a 'bullwhip effect,' in which small sales variations cause high levels of volatility, leading to factory underutilization, layoffs and delayed infrastructure investments. To navigate these challenges, fashion brands should consider investing in developing more transparent and collaborative relationships with their suppliers."



Amid all of this, controlling costs, a perennial issue for supply chains, remains a pressing priority, according to our survey.

87% of companies call price/margin pressure a serious or moderate problem for 2024 (CGS)

How will retailers, brands and their suppliers stay competitive? Digital transformation of the supply chain —from concept to consumer — is squarely in the crosshairs for many of the 300 executives who participated in the CGS BlueCherry<sup>®</sup> 2024 Supply Chain Trends and Technology Survey.

of businesses say digital transformation is a strategy they have taken, are taking or are planning to overcome challenges (CGS)



### **ROLLING WITH RETAIL SALES TRENDS**

U.S. December 2023 retail sales, an important barometer given holiday shopping, were up 5.6 percent year-over-year, reaching \$709.9 billion, according to <u>advance estimates from the U.S.</u> <u>Census Bureau</u>.

The bureau's Q3 2023 eCommerce sales report showed a slight increase in overall retail sales across channels and a stronger increase in online sales, which make up a growing share of total sales.



CGS survey findings dovetail with eCommerce momentum reflected in the government data. eCommerce ranked as the top 2024 growth opportunity for our survey's respondents.

#### > 81% of businesses see eCommerce as a very important or important 2024 growth opportunity (CGS).

"Online shopping is the retail industry gift that keeps on giving," said Daniella Ambrogi, CGS global senior marketing director, in her blog, "2023: A Look Back." "Leading brands and retailers are keeping both online and in-store shopping experiences fresh, with evertighter collaboration with their manufacturing, supply chain and technology partners."

Now retailers, brands and manufacturers will see if consumer spending holds steady, improves or decreases in 2024. "The word most pundits have used to describe the consumer landscape is 'uncertain.' While inflation has begun to ebb, and the hope is that it will lead the Federal Reserve to walk back interest rates and loosen the strings when it comes to borrowing costs, many consumers are still feeling cashstrapped. They are quick to call out higher grocery bills and loftier rents; buying a car or a house are pieces of the American dream that remain out of reach for many," wrote Susan Reda, National Retail Federation (NRF) vice president, education strategy, in "<u>7 Retail</u> Industry Predictions for 2024."

To confront these challenges, Reda said retailers will:

- > Look for ways to identify new opportunities
- Redesign physical stores to offer more experiences and efficiency
- Invest in tech projects to deliver personalization and operations optimization

#### **NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY**

There is also a good reason for tempered optimism. U.S. inflation rates came down in late 2023, but interest rates still make borrowing money and managing debt expensive. Crises such as the Israel-Hamas War, which started in October 2023, and the War in Ukraine, now in its third year, heighten supply chain risks and global economic and political uncertainty. Historically, wars have been associated with higher inflation and interest rates, according to **U.S. government data**.

Houthi rebels have fired on container ships in the Red Sea, a passage for 15 percent of global trade. At the Red Sea's northernmost point is the Suez Canal, which connects to the Mediterranean Sea. "*It's one of the most important arteries of global trade and global supply chains, and it's clogged up right now,*" Maersk CEO Vincent Clerc said in a January 2024 Reuters article. Many shippers are rerouting containers around Africa's Cape of Good Hope, which adds up to 12 days of transportation time, **BBC reported**.

Hard-to-predict outcomes for pivotal 2024 elections add to industry concerns. The U.S. presidential election is highest on many radars but votes around the world could disrupt business. For example, apparel-producing nations, including Bangladesh, India and Mexico, are just a few with elections this year. *"From Russia, Taiwan and the United Kingdom to India, El Salvador and South Africa, the presidential and legislative contests have huge implications for human rights, economies, international relations and prospects for peace in a volatile world," said an Associated Press article.* 

#### **STRATEGIC PLANNING TO MEET DEMAND**

Retail supply chains entered 2024 in recovery from the lashings of Covid's bullwhip. A new year's mantra for many: tighter inventory management.

The year will bring fresh and different approaches to demand planning. Artificial intelligence (AI) promises to play a significant role in forecasting demand. There is keen focus on hyper-personalization — tailoring product assortments and recommendations to narrow consumer segments or even individual shoppers.

Al-driven analytics also will influence other core business operations. "Using AI, companies can swiftly analyze huge and disparate amounts of data in real time, enabling faster decision-making, a reduction in human errors, increased efficiency and the automation of routine monotonous tasks," said Reda. "Indeed, the benefits of AI are far-flung — from product designs influenced by AI-enabled trendspotting and relying on AI to optimize product sourcing, to tapping into the technology for inventory forecasting and personalization along the shopper journey." >

#### TRENDS & 2024 OUTLOOK

Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) priorities will also require attention in 2024, as new regulations promise to be signed into law and consumers look for greater supply chain transparency. "Regulatory competence cannot be limited to a brand's sustainability team, but rather should be embraced throughout the C-suite and integrated across functions," said the BoF/McKinsey report. Here too, AI can help. CGS is developing an AI-powered ESG platform.

#### **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION'S ROLE**

End-to-end supply chain digitalization will help retailers, brands, wholesalers and their suppliers to respond to the uncertainties, challenges and opportunities that 2024 brings.

70%

of executives see digital transformation as a very important or important 2024 growth opportunity

Digital processes and connectivity support greater speed, agility and flexibility in responding to trends. This report will delve deeper into how and why businesses are leveraging technology as part of strategic plans to achieve their 2024 goals.

# TOP GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

# What do you see as the most **important** growth opportunities in 2024?

		Weighted Average Rating	# Respondents - Rating as "Very Important"	
Ranking	1	eCommerce (B2B or B2C)	3.29	54%
Ran	2	New Market Segments/Channels	3.05	35%
	3	Digital Transformation	3.01	38%
	4	Product Category Expansion	2.92	29%
	5	ESG: Environmental, Social, Governance	2.76	30%
	6	Transportation/Logistics	2.73	25%
	7	Brick & Mortar Stores	2.28	17%

# Respondents = 328

Ranked by weighted average of ratings on 4-point scale, from "not important" (1) to "very important (4).

### eCommerce is the clear standout as 2024's top growth opportunity.

We base these rankings on weighted averages. For this survey question, there were answer choices on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being "not important" and 4 being "very important." When it comes to eCommerce, 54 percent gave it the proverbial four stars, whereas the N°. 2 growth priority — new market segments/ channels — had 35 percent of respondents selecting "very important." Nineteen percentage points is quite a spread, and it's no wonder. Online sales continue to grow at a healthy pace. That growth might not be in the double digits every quarter, but it is building on a larger sales base. Newer digital sales channels such as social media, live streaming and the metaverse promise to keep opening new growth opportunities. >



#### TOP GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES



2023

			2020	
Ranking	1	eCommerce (B2B or B2C)	1	Ranking
Ran	2	New Market Segments/Channels	3	Ran
	3	Digital Transformation	N/A	
	4	Product Category Expansion	4	
	5	ESG: Environmental, Social, Governance	2	
	6	Transportation/Logistics	N/A	
	7	Brick & Mortar Stores	6	

# Respondents = 328

Ranked by weighted average of ratings on 4-point scale, from "not important" (1) to "very important (4). N/A = Not applicable. Answer option not included in prior year's survey.

Digital Transformation made a big debut as a growth opportunity for 2024. Almost 40 percent of respondents said it was "very important," another 31 percent rated it "important." These results reflect how digital processes, automation and strong analytics underpin success in every business growth area, including all others on the list.

• ESG wasn't rated as the chart-topping growth opportunity as it was last year. One factor could be tighter budgets. Businesses have done a lot on the sustainability front and might be pivoting to growth priorities such as digital transformation. Also, ESG initiatives might be viewed as less growth engine and more core business requirement. However, there are still opportunities to increase sales with outstanding ESG commitment, measurable improvements, and clearer transparency. One in three survey participants see ESG as "very important" to 2024 growth.

#### > Transportation/logistics

Some businesses, having invested in omnichannel fulfillment and distribution center automation, are offering their own third-party logistics (3PL) services to other companies. This is the case for retailers, wholesalers, brands and eCommerce businesses. It's a good example of how core competencies can evolve into revenue generators.

### **CASE STUDY**



The gentle ebb and flow of ocean tides provide a beautiful backdrop to "Living the Island Life," a motto the Tommy Bahama brand has embraced since day one. When the company was founded over 30 years ago, it set a new bar for the lifestyle brand business model. It serves not "customers" but "guests," delivering not just products but experiences, from shopping to dining to socializing over cocktails.

Tommy Bahama has evolved with the changing tides and shifting sands of the retail industry. In 2019, the company revamped its entire sourcing strategy, bringing functions from design to distribution in-house and diversifying production locations. Tommy Bahama has transitioned from having a supply base entirely in China to sourcing over 70 percent in Southeast Asia, India, Sri Lanka and Peru.

Now, the brand is confidently sailing into 2024 with solid operations and technology to support its most important business objectives.

### SURFING SKILLFULLY TO MORE SKUS

This will be a pivotal year as Tommy Bahama:

- Dives deeper into fashion —> Manage
- Offers more apparel sizes
- Manages inventory across two distribution centers (DC) vs. one

"We want to do more with less inventory. We want higher sell-through, more depth in fashion and, of course, to sell out of that fashion," said Jennifer Spoljaric, Executive Vice President, Supply Chain and Sustainability.

"Less" doesn't necessarily mean making fewer units but rather hitting narrower targets, giving guests more fashion choices and catering to diverse size and fit preferences. Tommy Bahama fashions have a track record of commanding full price, and the company wants to keep it that way. Spoljaric's team will rely on its strategic supplier network to execute these different >

**FOMMY BAHAMA** BIVING FASHION A BOOST  priorities. The brand values quality over price and is committed to sustained partnerships with suppliers. "We have very strong long-term relationships with our vendors," she said. "We have weathered Covid and other storms together, and our close partnerships will continue to be key to our success in 2024."

Like other brands in the Oxford Industries portfolio, Tommy Bahama is starting to use Oxford's DC in Lyons, Georgia. Augmenting Tommy Bahama's original West Coast DC, the Lyons fulfillment center will give the business greater speed in serving customers on the East Coast, especially in Florida, where there are 32 Tommy Bahama locations and many wholesale customers carrying the brand.

"Our biggest opportunity is to get the right product to the right place at the right time," said Spoljaric. "It might sound old school, but we need to be sharper with our inventory. For us, it's all about inventory control."

#### WADING INTO NEW COMPLEXITIES

The Tommy Bahama supply chain team uses the CGS BlueCherry<sup>®</sup> enterprise suite to manage core processes, from placing purchase orders to distributing products. *"I have a very complex organization, and my team is the biggest user of the solution within the company,"* said Spoljaric. *"We use it every day, everywhere."* 

Leveraging the second DC will enhance Tommy Bahama's agility in fulfilling orders across different channels and geographic markets, improving responsiveness to ecommerce and in-store demand. But for a business accustomed to the simplicity of receiving and shipping through a single DC, the new opportunities come with new complexities, especially for inbound shipment logistics. Tommy Bahama is building on its technology foundation with innovative use of artificial intelligence (AI). Starting with merchandise and financial plans, Impact Analytics' AI-driven technology will help the brand cast a tighter net to forecast demand. Next, the business will turn to machine learning to help steer inbound containers and cartons to the best DC and then allocate the right inventory to the right destinations.

The plan is to tie the line between AI-enhanced analytics, Spoljaric's team and BlueCherry®, the centralized solution for supply chain management. *"Better end-to-end visibility and control over logistics* — that is the digital transformation goal for us," she said.

The company will also leverage digitalization for better supply chain traceability in support of environmental, social and governance (ESG) goals. Tommy Bahama has invested in track-and-trace technology to ensure compliance with the U.S. Uyghur Forced Labor Prevent Act (UFLPA). In addition, the business wants to increase sourcing of preferred fibers, which have less environmental impact. "Better end-to-end visibility and control over logistics — that is the digital transformation goal for us," she said.

Tommy Bahama is also putting a toe in the waters of digital sampling. The brand plans to keep providing salespeople with physical samples wholesale customers love to touch and feel, but it wants to reduce sample rounds on the way to final approval.

With so much to accomplish in 2024, it won't be a walk on the beach, but the brand's strategies are sure to delight loyal guests and newcomers to Tommy Bahama's entrancing experience of the island life.

### **CASE STUDY**



**U.K**.- based Bollin Group is focused on three primary priorities in 2024:

#### > Inventory > Sustainability > Systems integration

All pose complex challenges. But Bollin is no stranger to complexity as the owner of over 30 brands and distributor of another dozen. A team of about 260 U.K. associates and 80 around the world manage a brand portfolio spanning apparel, outdoor goods, housewares and many other product categories.

While there are always headwinds, Bollin meets sales targets year after ayear. In 2024, the business is confident in its supply chain to support future growth.

This past year left Bollin with too much stock, a common problem on the heels of 2022's high demand and constrained supply. A retail supply chain reset is in process. "We believe demand in the first half of 2024 will be somewhat weak, but it should be better by the winter season, and then spring 2025 onward should show stronger recovery," said Stephen Cann, CEO and Director, Bollin.

Cann's cautious optimism is darkened by concerns about political uncertainties, especially around major elections in both the United Kingdom and the United States this year. *"It's one of our greatest concerns – the potential supply chain impact of this political uncertainty,"* he said.

#### **INVENTORY MANAGEMENT**

Bollin is tightening the inventory belt, following the lead of customers, which include high street retailers and independent stores.

Stock levels surged 63 percent in 2023 vs. 2022, and now Bollin is looking to reduce inventory by about 20 percent. This leaves room to support growth and healthy turnover rates.

The company's suppliers have more capacity and are offering shorter lead times, plus shipping costs have come down. These factors will help Bollin

efficiently source the right amount of products to meet demand. Cann sees opportunities to reduce the supplier base in order to forge closer relationships with a smaller vendor network. "We've got too many factories," he said. Bollin also wants to diversify sourcing to countries outside of China, which supplies 70 percent of the company's products.

#### **SUSTAINABILITY**

Bollin has gradually shifted sourcing out of Myanmar, given human rights concerns. Cann said another sourcing locale now poses risks for unfair labor practices. Bollin might need to move manufacturing elsewhere in that case, too. Social and environmental responsibility is an important imperative for Bollin, a member of the Fair Wear Foundation (FWF). FWF is an independent, nonprofit organization that works with brands and factories to improve garment industry labor conditions.

"Sustainability is becoming a bigger and bigger issue," said Cann, noting that Bollin puts a significant investment into factory audits. Consistent with the fashion industry norm, more than 80 percent of Bollin's carbon footprint is from scope 3 emissions, those from the supply chain. This includes upstream tiers of suppliers such as textile mills and fabric finishers. While such emissions are hard to control, brands and retailers are called on to do more, given new regulations.

Environmental, social and governance (ESG) auditing costs are another driver behind supply chain consolidation. *"We need fewer relationships, but better ones,"* he said.

#### SYSTEMS INTEGRATION

A key to Bollin's success is seizing opportunities to acquire new brands and sign U.K. distribution licensing deals. Experience also has taught Cann, a Bollin director for over 30 years, about shedding brands when the time is right. Footwear is a growth category now. Bollin recently acquired U.K. distribution rights for Boston-based Topo Athletic. Other footwear and apparel brands in the Bollin stable include Obōz, Ronhill, Sprayway, Hilly, Mountain Equipment and Brightboot.

"We think the new brands we've added in the footwear category will grow in 2024 and 2025," said Cann.New business relationships often drive the need for technology systems integration. A top priority is for Bollin's systems to "talk" more seamlessly with customers' systems. "It's one of the most important things to us – communication between systems," Cann said.

Bollin uses the end-to-end enterprise and PLM solution Visual Next, which was acquired by CGS BlueCherry<sup>®</sup> in 2019. Bollin has successfully integrated this core business technology with Microsoft Power BI, a tool for advanced data analysis and visualization. As a result, Cann always has key performance metrics at his fingertips. "It's where I get all of my numbers," he said. "It's what I look at with my management team every Monday morning."

- > Connecting the dots between supply and demand.
- > Keeping inventory lean and productive.
- Improving systems integration to share data with customers.
- Ensuring best practices to protect workers and the environment.

Tackling these business objectives across more than 40 brands is a tall order, but Bollin is charging ahead with its sights set on a successful 2024.

## GREATEST CHALLENGES & IMPROVEMEN PRIORITIES

## What do you see as your **biggest supply chain challenges** in 2024?

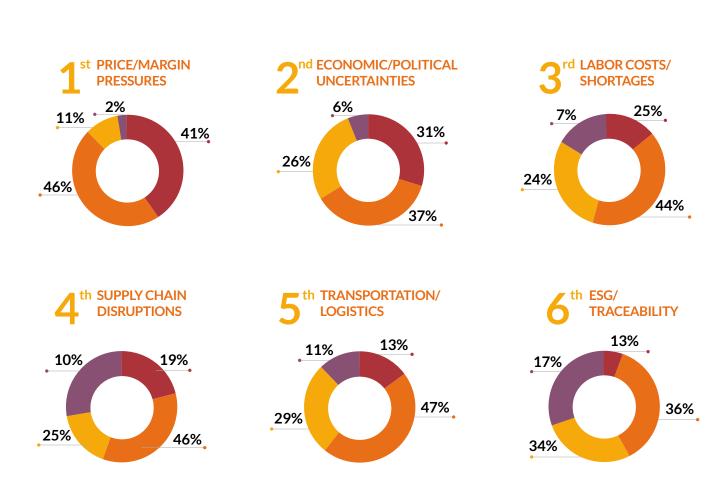
	2024		2023	3
Ranking	1	Price/margin pressures	3	Ranking
Ran	2	Economic/political uncertainties	1	Ran
	3	Labor costs/shortages	2	
	4	Supply chain disruptions	6	
	5	Transportation/Logistics	5	
	6	ESG/Traceability	N/A	

# Respondents = 328

N/A = Not applicable. Answer option not included in prior year's survey.

## Please rank your **improvement priorities** in 2024.

Serious Problem
Moderate Problem
Minor Problem
Not a Problem



### **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

A new "improvement priority" added to our latest survey, digital transformation clearly has the attention of industry leaders. "You've come out of a period with a lot of disruption and capacity crunch, and demand is uncertain. There's definitely an increased interest in technology solutions that can help brands see more clearly what's happening in their supply chains, giving them the ability to respond more quickly," said Christos Chamberlain, Flexport, in a **Vogue Business** article.

Digital transformation is instrumental to every other improvement priority ranked in our research. For example, Al-driven analytical tools hone the accuracy of consumer demand planning. Also, seamlessly integrated ERP, PLM and shop-floor control solutions improve supply chain productivity and visibility.

- **49%** of retailers, manufacturers, wholesalers and eCommerce businesses see Digital Transformation as one of their Top 3 improvement priorities for 2024 (CGS)
- 82% of sourcing executives plan to increase technology spending significantly (Sourcing Journal)

### **PRICE PRESSURES**

High 2022 demand shifted to lower 2023 demand, putting pressure on retail supply chains to lower costs.

- 7.7% and 1.9% the U.S. non-fuel import price indexes,
   April 2022 and April 2023, respectively (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)
- 20% to 50% decrease in order demand among garment industry fabric, yarn and raw materials suppliers Q1 2022 to Q1 2023 (BoF/McKinsey)

### ECONOMIC/POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY

Businesses hate unpredictability. Contentious politics, fiscal policy, wars and trade conflicts heighten risks, make planning more difficult and influence inflation, interest rates and consumer spending. On the flip side, conflict resolution, peacemaking and decided elections can also boost business.

## 78%

of manufacturers polled by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) rated "political dysfunction" as a major concern for their company (NAM)

**45%** 

of investors believe results of 2024 U.S. presidential and federal congressional elections will have a bigger impact on their retirement plans and portfolios than market performance (Nationwide)



### LABOR COSTS/SHORTAGES

From sewing operators to truck drivers to IT professionals, skilled labor availability and costs are significant challenges. The fashion industry also competes for labor with industries such as auto manufacturing.

- > 20% of U.S. textile industry experiencing worker shortages (Fortune)
- 71% of manufacturers say attracting and retaining a quality workforce is the biggest challenge they faced as of Q4 2023 (NAM)

### **SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS**

A September 2023 McKinsey survey of chief procurement officers found that 73 percent believe demand volatility will challenge supplier relationships over the next five years.

- 30% to 40% fashion industry factory capacity utilization levels in 2023 due to order decreases vs. 100% utilization in 2021 (BoF/McKinsey)
- 1 in 3 retail planning executives globally feel unprepared for another large-scale supply chain shock (Vogue Business)

### **TRANSPORTATION/LOGISTICS CHALLENGES**

The reprieve from pandemic shipping problems was short-lived amid current war and climate issues.

 36% of Panama Canal ship crossings stopped by authorities due to drought (Associated Press)

12% to 15% of global commercial shipping passed through Red Sea to Suez
 Canal before Houthi missile attacks (BBC)

 7 to 14 days of extra shipping time required to reroute shipments to avoid Red Sea war-related risks (Supply Chain Dive)

> 114% increase since mid-December 2023 in non-contract "spot" rates for container shipments out of Chinese ports (<u>Reuters</u>)



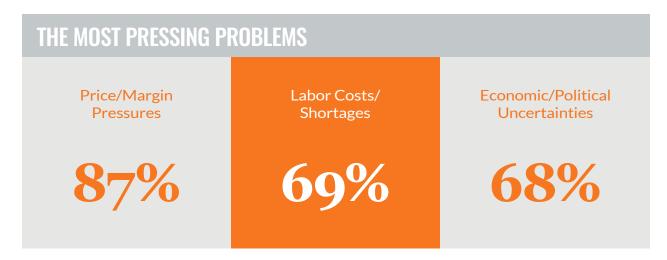


GREATEST CHALLENGES & IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES

#### **ESG/TRACEABILITY**

In 2022, supply chains rushed to comply with the U.S. Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, signed into law in June 2022. In 2023, many companies caught their breath on the ESG front and fought other fires, but sustainability and social responsibility continue to demand their attention.

- 49% of supply chain executives consider ESG/Traceability a serious to moderate problem (CGS)
- > 40 jurisdictions globally are working on ESG rules (Harvard)



Percentage of respondents saying issue will be a "**serious**" or "**moderate**" **problem** in 2024.



### **CGS EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS**

## **SUPPLY CHAIN VISIBILITY:** A CORE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

## Paul Magel

Is uncertainty the new normal? It was during the pandemic. Now, it seems that when one disruption is alleviated, another takes its place.

- Drought impacting Panama Canal commerce
- Red Sea logistics blockages due to war
- Inflation's impact on consumer wallets
- High interest rates/cost of borrowing money

These are just a few pressures that have retailers, brands and manufacturers alike concerned about successfully navigating 2024. In 2023, a lot of companies struggled with the pandemic's lingering bullwhip effect, particularly suppliers stuck with excess inventory. Since 2020, big swings in supply and demand have caused retail orders to drop, then surge and then slow down.

"The only way to minimize and manage that uncertainty is visibility throughout the supply chain," said Paul Magel, President, Business Applications, CGS. "Then you can react. You might need to zig when you thought you had to zag and vice versa. To do that, you need real-time supply chain visibility."

### SUPPLY CHAIN CONNECTIVITY

CGS BlueCherry<sup>®</sup> is always listening and learning about customers' specific business challenges and goals so that its team can be the best partner on process improvements and technology solutions to achieve business objectives. Right now, supply chain connectivity is important for many companies.

When stakeholders across the supply chain are connected digitally on a centralized technology platform, they can share information and collaborate much easier and faster. This is a competitive advantage. Pivotal decisions can be made earlier to head off potential problems and ensure products get to market on time to meet consumer demand. Agility also enables businesses to quickly respond to opportunities, such as a hot fashion trend or acquisition prospect.

"If you know where your products and orders are at any given minute, then if there are disruptions or unexpected challenges, you can reroute or make other changes to your plans," said Magel. "It's crucial to connect all of the links in the supply chain." >

- End-to-end supply chain management technology makes this possible — and efficient to implement even for the complex extended supply networks of SKU-intensive industries such as:
  - Retail
- > Footwear
- Apparel
- Accessories
- > Footwear
- Consumer lifestyle
- Home goods
- products

### **ESG AND VISIBILITY**

There are multiple benefits of greater supply chain visibility and digital connectivity. For example, supply chain digital transformation supports compliance with environmental, social and governance (ESG) regulations and customer requirements.

CGS BlueCherry<sup>®</sup> offers solutions to help brands, retailers and their suppliers to more easily:

- > Share and centralize critical ESG documentation
- Gain transparency to chain-of-custody handoffs
- Validate data accuracy
- Extract and cleanse data from disparate sources
- > Digitally map supply chain tiers

Supply chain digital transformation also opens the door to closer supplier partnerships and greater sharing of business risks and rewards. Focus on supplier relationships has waned a bit compared with a big push to rebuild trust after Covid's darkest chapters, when sales plummeted and thousands of orders were canceled. But now is not the time to let off the gas, Magel said. For example, shared investment in efficiency-boosting shop floor control technology benefits retailers, brands and their manufacturing partners. It gives production operators greater visibility to individual productivity and earnings. There is better trackand-trace capability to product origins and clearer transparency to wages, incentive pay and offstandard events. This creates an accurate digital trail of readily available records and documentation to support ESG claims and ensure compliance with laws, industry best practices and customer mandates.

"It's one thing to say you're going to track this information, but how do you know it's valid and accurate?" Magel said. "You cannot have a viable business if you are not complying with the law. Companies need a platform to serve as a container for all the information they need to track, connect their supply chains, convert information into a consistent format and automate these processes."

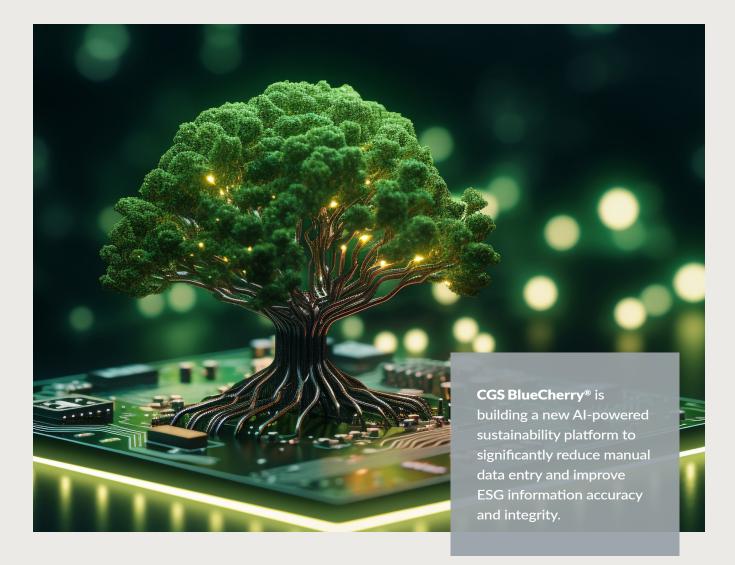
### **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)**

Almost every technology conversation today includes some mention of artificial intelligence (AI). In 2023, ChatGPT and other generative Al tools were central to intellectual property (IP) controversies, such as the entertainment industry writers' strike. But for many retailers, brands and manufacturers, AI can seem like a challenging thing to harness. Where does it make the most sense to invest?

- Predicting demand and personalizing product offerings
- Scrubbing documents and data to validate ESG compliance
- Digitally "listening" to consumer fashion preferences to inform design decisions
- Anticipating supply chain disruptions due to weather, logistics or other risk factors

These are ways some leading businesses are harnessing AI. But even if your company does not have in-house talent or time to focus on AI, the benefits of this powerful technology are already being built into solutions many businesses use every day, Magel said. "Technology is always evolving, and AI is the next evolution of productivity tools."

For example, type-ahead suggestions, automated customer service chatbots, Internet searches, and online shopping recommendations are part of our daily lives. "Al will continue to be seamlessly integrated into current tools companies use," he said. "There will be more Al-driven prediction, scenario modeling and natural language processing."

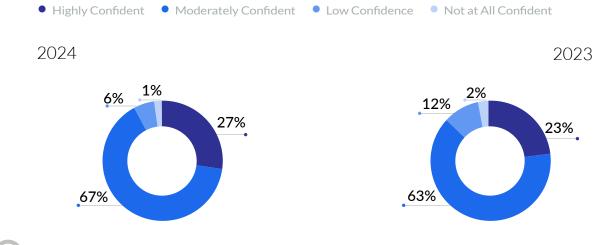


Responding to changing consumer demand, meeting customer expectations and increasing sales are common goals of every business. The right technology partner works to identify the best business processes and technology solutions to achieve these objectives. "Our team is focused on delivering solutions that are justified technology investments, delivering clear business benefits," said Magel.

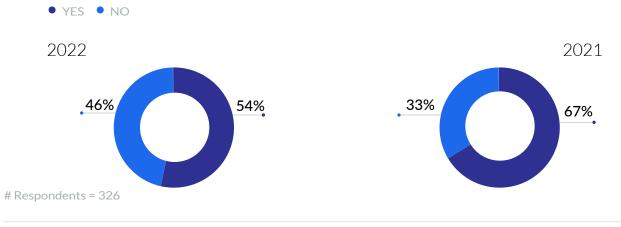
# SUPPLY CHAIN CONFIDENCE & Relationships

### **MEASURING SUPPLY CHAIN CONFIDENCE: TIMING MATTERS**

## Rate your level of confidence in your current supply chain's ability to support your 2024 business objectives?



Are you confident in your end-to-end supply chain to support your business growth initiatives?



#### SUPPLY CHAIN CONFIDENCE & RELATIONSHIPS

Respondents first answered our then-new survey question about supply chain confidence in December 2020. The results were used in our 2021 Supply Chain Trends & Technology Report (see 2021 results in chart). That year and again in 2021, the survey offered "yes/no" answer choices. More specifically, the options were: "Yes, I'm confident with our supply chain to support our initiatives in the coming year," or "No, there is room for improvement in our supply chain processes." For the past two years, the survey offered four answers, so we can measure confidence levels with a finer-tooth comb.

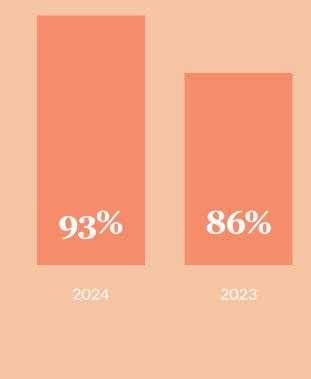
Bearing in mind that respondents completed our survey in the last month of the year preceding the report and that we do not have an apples-to-apples comparison across the past four years, here are a few takeaways from our findings.

> That almost 70 percent of survey participants had solid supply chain confidence heading into 2021 was surprising. But when we analyzed survey results for preceding years, we saw a common thread: Companies were keenly aware of the need for greater supply chain visibility and collaboration dating back to 2017. The results also showed meaningful technology investment in connected ERP and PLM, for example, to improve supply chain digitalization. These investments and strong supplier relationships paid off.

Yet when one problem lets up, another takes its place. And what seems like a good thing — a surge in demand — can also be a big challenge. In fall 2021, Covid's bullwhip was beginning to unfurl. Supply chains felt the pressure to keep up with surging demand. Perhaps this led to shakier confidence as respondents took our survey in December 2021. > Analyzing the most recent years' results, it's likely that those supply-and-demand swings continue to influence confidence levels. Yet the results also indicate that the very same supply chain investments that helped businesses survive 2020 are helping them stay competitive now.

## Rising Supply Chain Confidence

% "Highly" or "Moderately" Confident in Their Supply Chains



#### SUPPLY CHAIN RELATIONSHIPS: STILL WORKING TO GET ON THE SAME PAGE

## What steps should **manufacturers** take to improve supply chain performance?

#### 2024

Ranking	1	Increase Productivity/Efficiency
Ran	2	Reduce Costs
	3	Increase Flexibility
	4	Digital Transformation
	5	Small Lot Production
	6	Ramp Up ESG Initiatives

Supply chain relationships mirror the major growth opportunities, challenges and improvement priorities of survey participants. Manufacturers are under pressure to do more — more efficiently, while lowering costs and being flexible — no easy feat. Buyers and sourcing teams need to work on their vendor relationships — collaborating more closely on realistic timelines and sharing risks/rewards by offering longer-term commitments. The case studies in this report highlight a common theme: building trust and a reliable track record between those who buy and those who supply is a strategy for success.

#### DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: A NEW TOP 5 PRIORITY

Supply chain partners agreed on one thing: **It's** essential to embrace technology, automate processes and digitally connect their operations. These are master keys to greater visibility, transparency, efficiency, and cost control. A win-win all around!

## What steps should **Buyers/Sourcing Teams** take to improve supply chain performance?

2024

		2024
1	Improve supplier relationships	Ranking
2	Set realistic delivery schedules	Ran
3	Provide longer term commitments	
4	Embrace digital transformation	
5	Support technology projects	
6	Increase pay/make timely payments	5

## Top 3 Supply Chain Steps Needed

Percentage of respondents ranking these issues among the top 3 improvements they would like to see from supply chain partners.

## 88% want Improved Supplier Relationships

75% want Increased Productivity Efficiency

64% want Realistic Delivery Schedules

63% want Reduced Costs



### **CASE STUDY**

### 

A happy customer. That is priority No. 1 for Confetex, a Mexican full-package apparel provider to top U.S. denim brands.

"At the end of the day, if you are not doing what your customer expects you to do, you are not doing anything," said Fernando Galan, Confetex CEO. "We make sure we can deliver what our customer is asking us to deliver. That is the foundation of having a strong relationship."

U.S. brands have turned to Puebla-based Confetex for nearly 30 years for full-package denimwear production, including washing, dyeing, finishing, embellishment, cutting and sewing. The manufacturer ships in bulk and drop-ships products when customers want to bypass their distribution centers and get goods to market faster.

#### INVESTING IN THE BUSINESS: ALWAYS SHARPENING THE SWORD

Confetex has built a successful track record by continually investing in its business. Even during difficult economic times, the company keeps its focus on how to improve competitiveness. Recent macro-level financial pressures have included:

- > 12+ percent increase in the Mexican peso's value per U.S. dollar
- 7+ percent inflation rates in 2022, still hovering at 4+ percent as of early 2024
- 20 percent minimum wage increase in 2024, mandated by the Mexican government, on top of earlier increases

How is Confetex confronting these challenges? It proactively communicates with customers, investing in labor-saving automation and increasing efficiency to ensure it delivers high-quality products on time at a competitive price.

By mid-year, the company expects its two factories, which employ approximately 1,500 people, to earn ISO9001 certification, a reflection of strong quality management, standardized processes, and a culture of continuous improvement. >

- In addition, the manufacturer is going live with CGS BlueCherry<sup>®</sup> Shop Floor Control (SFC) technology to gain better productivity, visibility and control of production. Operators, supervisors, mechanics, engineers and executive leaders will have realtime, actionable insights important to their roles, including:
  - Order tracking
  - > Productivity by style, line and operator
  - Individual achievements toward goals
  - Improved workforce morale
  - Production line balancing
  - Performance monitoring
  - > Quality control
  - Machine maintenance

Confetex plans to partner with CGS to integrate SFC with enterprise resource planning. One of the core objectives is to improve inventory control. "Digitalization is key to our competitiveness, and if you know your numbers, you will find ways to do better," Galan said.

Confetex also wants to attract younger generations to its manufacturing team. Using new technologies is one way the company can show prospective associates that the garment industry offers attractive career opportunities.

The business has embraced automation. It installed laser systems to replace manual sanding and whiskering of denim jeans, steps performed to get the popular worn-in look. Confetex is exploring new digital solutions to lower costs and improve quality in laundry operations, where large quantities of denim fabric are washed, dyed and finished to customer specifications. New technologies make it possible to achieve precise fabric colors and control shrinkage while reducing labor, stonewashing and hazardous chemical use.

#### MAKING SUSTAINABILITY A TOP PRIORITY

Confetex does a lot of washing, but "greenwashing" is something you'll never see it do. When it comes to environmental sustainability, the company is making significant investments and will have a growing body of evidence to prove it. "It's something we as human beings have a responsibility to do. Sustainability needs to be a common path with everyone in the industry going that way," Galan said. "If we all keep doing things the way they have been done in the past, it hurts everybody."

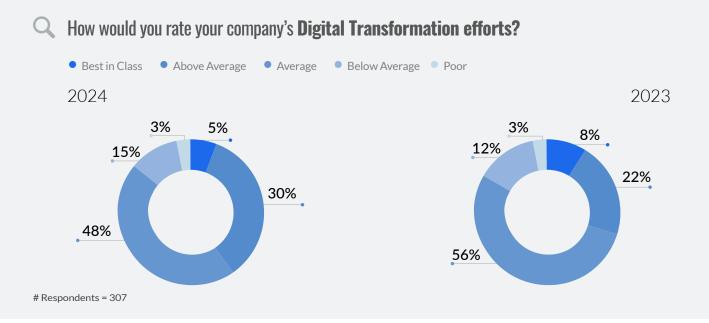
The business has hired consultants to evaluate all operations, establish baseline measurements and recommend changes, working with the Higg Index Tools of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition and pursuing certification through that organization. While it is still early days of laying the groundwork, Confetex is already making progress. It has installed some solar panels and built a water treatment facility that recycles 40 percent of laundry wastewater.

"It takes time to improve. It doesn't happen overnight. But now we know exactly where there is waste, how much gas we're using per garment and other environmental impact metrics," Galan said. "If you don't know where you stand, you can't measure improvements. Sustainability programs must be maintained for the long term as a way of doing business."

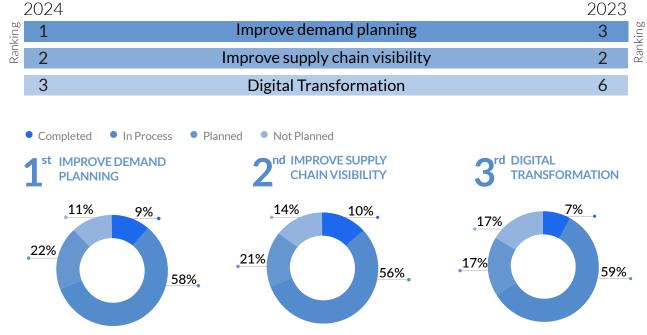
- > Staying a step ahead with sustainability.
- Investing in end-to-end supply chain management.
- Meeting customer expectations and keeping them happy.

All are reasons Confetex is a successful business. As Galan summed it up: "We expect stability, we expect better demand than in 2023, we believe 2024 is going to be a good year, and we also are optimistic for 2025."

# SUCCESS STRATEGIES DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION



 ${f Q}$  What actions have you taken or plan to take to overcome challenges?



# Respondents = 307

Notes: Rankings based on cumulative percentage of respondents who have taken or plan action. Percentages might not equal 100% because an "Other" options was an answer choice. have taken or plan action.



#### **DIGITALIZATION GAINS MOMENTUM**

Cumulative percentage of respondents who have completed, are working on or planning actions.

86%

Improve Supply Chain Visibility

83% Digital Transformation The needle is moving forward for companies' digital transformation initiatives. The share of respondents who consider their efforts "best in class" remains a single-digit slice of the pie. However, there is a clear progression of businesses moving up the ladder. This is most evident in the eight percentage-point shift between those who count their efforts as "average" vs. "above average." It is as if companies on the "average" rung of the ladder literally saw a step-change that took them up to the "above average" level.

How are they doing this? Their top three actions to overcome challenges say a lot.

Action	2023 Status	% of 2023 Respondents	2024 Status	% of 2024 Respondents	2024 Status
Improve Demand Planning	Planned	50%	Completed	9%	In Process
Improve Supply Chain Visibility	Planned	56%	Completed	10%	In Process
Digital Transformation	Planned	50%	Completed	7%	In Process

#### PLANS PUT INTO ACTION YEAR-OVER-YEAR



### **CASE STUDY**

## © ♥ ⊕ Hatley

Like many apparel businesses that survived the pandemic's worst, premium pajama brand Hatley came away from it all with a thicker skin.

That's one reason recent challenges — inflation, interest rates, fuel prices, port strikes, Red Sea shipping disruptions, new environmental regulations — feel like par for the course. Just another day in paradise. The pandemic was a sink-or-swim period for the family-owned business, but it powered through and survived.

"I can now officially say: I have seen it all," states CEO Jeremy Oldland, a 25year veteran of the Montreal-based company. "Bad things happen. You've just got to be prepared. You've got to roll with it."

#### **ECOMMERCE: CONNECTING THE DIGITAL DOTS**

Soft wholesale demand from brick-and-mortar retail stores is one of the hard things Hatley is having to roll with. Thankfully, ecommerce is growing, and Hatley is seizing on that opportunity to grow sales globally. The brand reaches consumers in 38 countries. The lion's share of sales come from Canada and the United States, but there's healthy demand in Europe and the U.K., too.

What technology strategy supports Hatley's ecommerce growth strategies? Oldland has one word: Integration.

The company's top tech priority is to continue connecting its CGS BlueCherry® ERP core business solution to all things ecommerce: online marketplaces, EDI, shipping providers, retail customer websites and hatley.com.

"Everything's integrations now," Oldland said. "People don't talk with one another. Our computers are talking with their computers. It's all about how your technology talks with the ecommerce websites." >

Hatley counts on CGS to help it navigate this complex web of integrations, making sure connections are seamless and automated. Every customer has specific requirements for order management, fulfillment, shipping confirmations and inventory visibility. Compliance is necessary.

Plus, ecommerce customers aren't going to hold the proverbial hand to get these mission-critical integrations done right. "The biggest seller in the world is Amazon ... and they don't have a phone number," Oldland said. "If you want to sell on Amazon properly, then you need to be able to integrate with their networks, and there's no one at Amazon who's going to take a phone call to walk you through it."

Strong ecommerce sales are a testament to Hatley's successful digital integration. *"We're 'all in' on ecommerce these days,"* said Oldland.

#### SUPPLY CHAIN: RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Hatley's high-quality, fashionable sleepwear collections attract shoppers who are looking for something special, differentiated from the pajama pack. With prices well above those of the mass merchants,

Hatley's products are popular as gifts for birthdays, baby showers and other occasions. The company has never been one to chase cheap labor. Instead, it prioritizes long-term relationships and excellent quality.

Long-time, dedicated partnerships with two production partners — one in India, the other in China — are essential to brand reputation, reliability and excellent customer experience for retailers and consumers alike. *"With our volumes, we could probably*  use five factories, but as I discovered many years ago, it's a lot of work to jump around, and we must have consistent quality," said Oldland. "What happens when you chase too many factories and keep chasing pennies? You get massive reductions in quality." The company's Indian manufacturing base has supported Hatley's growth for many years. The business gives back to the community there through Sevalaya, a non-governmental organization provided essential food, shelter and education to children in more than 40 Indian villages.

This is one example of how Hatley is committed to being a true partner with suppliers. It's a symbiotic relationship. When shipping costs finally came down and labor costs stabilized, Hatley's manufacturing partners were able to offer lower full-package freight-on-board (FOB) prices. Keen to drive sales amid sluggish consumer demand, Hatley has passed along these cost savings to customers.

Hatley and its suppliers share purchase orders, invoices, packing lists and other shipping documents through the BlueCherry® Supply Chain Management (SCM) solution. "Particularly in India, the factories are not always technologically advanced. With this solution, they can get us what we need," Oldland said.

The company is confident in its supply chain, though there are always new hurdles. On the radar now: limited organic cotton supply and new environmental regulations for fabric dyeing and rubber boot manufacturing. But for Hatley, powering through such problems is the norm.

"You just have to continually push forward and make it happen," said Oldland. With that, the Hatley pajama brand successfully rolls on.

# **TECHNOLOGY** PRIORITIES

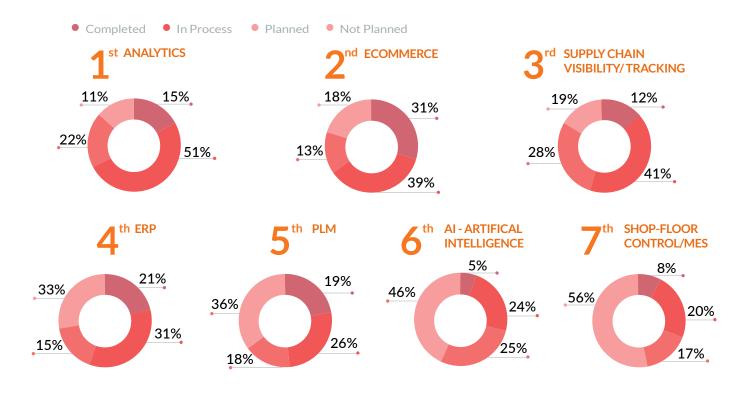
# What technologies have you or do you plan to put in place in the near future?

2024		2023
1	Analytics	Ranking V/N
2	eCommerce	Ran Ran
3	Supply Chain Visibility/Tracking	2
4	ERP	5
5	PLM	6
6	AI-Artifical Intelligence	N/A
7	Shop-Floor Control/MES	7

# Respondents = 328

Ranked by weighted average of ratings on 4-point scale, from "not important" (1) to "very important (4).

N/A = Not applicable. Answer option not included in prior year's survey.



## Top 3 Tech Priorities

Cumulative percentage of respondents who have completed, are working on or planning actions.



## Supply Chain Technologies: Plans Become Reality

Year-over-year survey results show how many companies are coming through on their intentions and plans to implement end-to-end supply chain solutions.

Technology Priority	2023 Status	% of 2023 Respondents	2024 Status	% of 2024 Respondents	2024 Status	% of 2024 Respondents
Supply Chain Visibility/ Tracking	Planned	43%	Completed	12%	In Process	41%
ERP	Planned	33%	Completed	19%	In Process	31%
PLM	Planned	35%	Completed	19%	In Process	26%
SFC/MEC	Planned	30%	Completed	8%	In Process	20%

## **AI: ACTIVITY BUILDS**

Businesses also show meaningful interest in AI, with one-fourth of respondents saying AI work is in process and another quarter planning AI activities. While almost one-half do not have AI plans at the moment, it will be interesting to see how this innovative technology works its way into more supply chain business processes, including design, sourcing, marketing, customer experience and fulfillment.



# **KEY** TAKEAWAYS



**1. Digital transformation** became a bright star of the show in this 2024 edition of our annual report of supply chain trends and technologies. Among that star's points: It's seen as the N° 3 growth opportunity and improvement priority, the N° 4 ranked action necessary to improve supply chain performance, and the N° 3 ranked action companies are leveraging to overcome challenges.



**2. Digital sales** are the N°. 1 growth opportunity among many retailers, manufacturers, brands, wholesalers and, of course, eCommerce businesses. Our research has borne out this trend for six consecutive years. Q3-Q4 2023 eCommerce sales increases bode well for another year of healthy online shopping and spending in 2024.



**3. Uncertainty** is a major concern on multiple fronts. Over 90 percent of our survey respondents said economic/political uncertainties are expected to be a supply chain challenge in 2024, yet only one-third see this as a "serious problem." Problems getting containers through both the Panama and Suez canals — and related increased shipping costs — have put transportation and logistics uncertainties back on the table after a brief return to normal post-pandemic.



**4. Environmental, social and governance (ESG)** efforts ranked as lower priorities when comparing year-over-year results. This might reflect significant progress already made to comply with the most pressing mandates, such as the UFLPA. Still, when it comes to supply chain challenges, 49 percent of respondents said ESG/traceability poses a serious or moderate problem for their business. The majority of survey participants consider ESG "very important" or "important" for their growth.

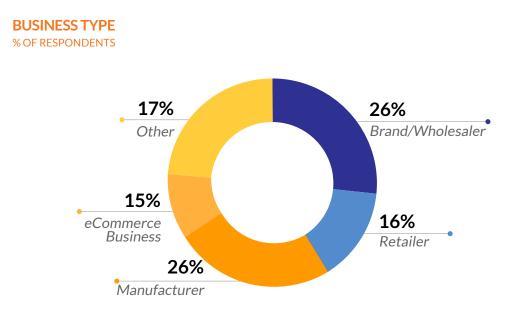


**5. Price/margin pressure** was ranked the N° 1 supply chain challenge for 2024, working its way up from being ranked as the third greatest challenge last year. Reducing costs is seen as the most important improvement priority this year, as it was for 2023. The pandemic's bullwhip effect has been a frustrating culprit, sending demand way up in 2022 and leaving many with excess inventory, plummeting orders and underutilized factory capacity in 2023. However, despite these difficult hurdles, 94 percent of survey participants have high or moderate confidence in their supply chains to support their 2024 business objectives. Results also show they are carrying out technology priorities to streamline and strengthen their operations, from concept to consumer.

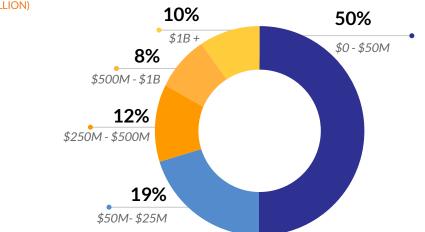


# ABOUT THE **SURVEY**

The CGS 2024 Supply Chain Trends and Technology Report highlights the results of a market research survey conducted by CGS during December 2023. More than 300 industry professionals participated. The following graphics show the demographics of our survey sample population.



#### ANNUAL REVENUE

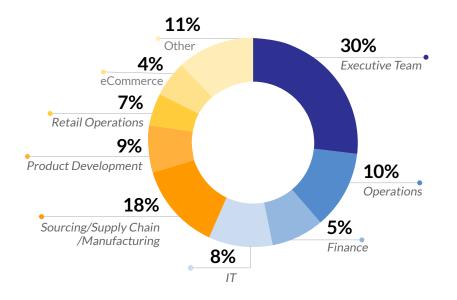


(REVENUE IN US\$, M = MILLION, B = BILLION)



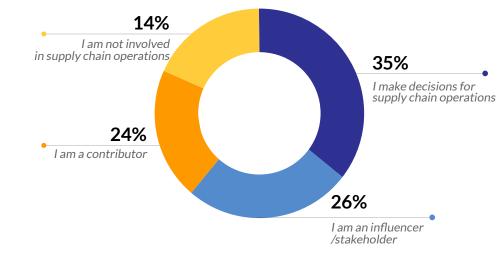
# ABOUT THE **SURVEY**

#### **PROFESSIONAL ROLE** % OF RESPONDENTS



**ROLE IN SUPPLY CHAIN OPERATIONS** 

% OF RESPONDENTS





# ABOUT BlueCherry Rocks

**BlueCherry**<sup>®</sup> is an award-winning, end to end supply chain management solution, supporting the needs of high-growth organizations operating in consumer lifestyle products, retail, and apparel. sThe platform provides complete visibility and resilient supply chain management tools from planning and product development to manufacturing and sales. A robust and flexible feature set enables customers to utilize individual components or take advantage of a single, unified platform.



#### With end-to-end capabilities, the CGS' BlueCherry Enterprise Suite includes:

- Product Lifecycle Management
- > Enterprise Resource Planning
- > Shop Floor Control

- > B2B eCommerce
- > Omnichannel Warehouse Mgmt.
- > Omnichannel Merchandise Planning
- Business Intelligence
- Business Integrations

#### TRUSTED BY THESE AMAZING COMPANIES

