Evolving the consumer products value chain

*Building transparency and intelligence with solutions from IBM, Motorola and Zebra Technologies*

The marketplace for consumer goods is highly variable and increasingly complex. In the drive to compete, companies along the entire value chain are focused on leveraging sophisticated technology to find better, faster and smarter ways to meet shifting demands and gain competitive advantage. Suppliers want to plan more effectively to reduce waste and generate real-time forecasts. Manufacturers seek to make the most of their product mix and reduce costs. Distributors want to streamline operations and get the right products onto shelves as quickly and efficiently as possible to drive greater sales and market share.

These companies have always sought better ways to operate, promote and merchandise. What is different today is the ability to capture and make use of more data than ever before. Technologies such as RFID and integrated tracking systems are powerful tools that allow businesses to work much more efficiently. Every interaction yields useful information, whether it's tracing a wireless tag, scanning a barcode, creating a bill of lading, running an in-store promotion or fulfilling an online order.

The businesses that can best manage, manipulate and understand that data to improve the way they work and merchandise stand to gain real competitive advantage. Solutions that monitor and help control product flow, for example, enable greater visibility and coordination across the supply chain. Combined with analytics, they allow business processes to be streamlined while creating insight that optimizes business outcomes by helping to achieve a “single version of the truth.” It is a virtuous cycle – information gathered along the chain is used to support actions at every stage, from raw materials sourcing all the way to in-store product placement.

Highlights:

- Helps improve productivity, sales performance and efficiency across the value chain
- Simplifies processes to reduce costs and improve accuracy
- Fosters information sharing between field workers and enterprise systems for greater transparency and increased sales visibility
- Promotes tighter control of assets and products from manufacturing to delivery and beyond, through in-store trade promotions tracking
- Helps value chain partners work together better through greater integration of systems and information
The critical challenge lies in harvesting that information and using it in the real world at the point of interaction. Manual, paper-based processes and siloed systems simply are not efficient or transparent enough to enable the desired outcomes. Information has to be made more available, while workers need new tools to help them gather and make the best use of the data.

For companies all along the consumer products value chain, IBM, Motorola and Zebra Technologies offer a diverse and comprehensive range of mobile and wireless technologies. Their industry-specific solutions put technology everywhere workers need it – in the plant, at the distribution center, in the retail store and on the go.

**Touching every part of the value chain**
The more closely coupled the supply chain’s processes and technology, the more efficient, agile and competitive it can be. No matter what your company’s role in the consumer products ecosystem, mobile technology holds the potential to enhance a company’s ability to connect, integrate, analyze and act on information.

Wherever people and products come together, there is an opportunity to take advantage of mobility solutions. It may be ad-hoc reporting at a field office, taking inventory, tagging and tracing individual parts, tracking whole shipments, obtaining proof of delivery, printing invoices, setting up merchandising displays, creating planograms or labeling shelves in a store.

The uses are many. The common thread is the ability to capture and utilize information on the move. Consider just a few of the possibilities, each enabled by a dedicated solution from IBM, Motorola and Zebra.

**Manufacturers**
When a manufacturer or supplier has greater visibility into and control over what’s happening on the factory floor, as well as in the field, it can help make all its processes much more efficient. Costs and production downtime can be reduced, and speed to market improved. With RFID and traceability solutions that take advantage of wireless infrastructure from Motorola, tagging solutions from Zebra and underlying IT systems and integration from IBM, the location and status of products, parts and assets such as equipment can be closely monitored and linked to the company’s enterprise systems. Mobile connectivity solutions can also be used throughout the facility by managers, service technicians and line workers for real-time access to information and systems.

Solutions for manufacturing operations include:

- Asset and inventory tracking with RFID and barcode scanning
- Plant floor wireless connectivity
- Real-time, location-based tracking and reporting
- Asset management and maintenance
- Mobile manager dashboards, alarms and alerts
- Mobile human-machine interfaces
- Work-in-process and labor tracking
- Mobile field service support
- Error-proofing and process standardization
- Inspection and quality control
- Track & trace data collection/labeling
- Materials replenishment
- Trade promotion management

**Warehousing and distribution**
Locating inventory, positively identifying it and routing it through the distribution hub is made far simpler if the technology is available at the point of interaction. Mobile computers, scanning devices and wireless infrastructure from Motorola combine with tagging and tracking solutions from Zebra. These technologies integrate with warehouse management systems and databases, whether proprietary or from leading third-party vendors. The business gains highly accurate visibility into the location, movement and destination for everything in the facility, with the potential for highly automated inventory processes.

Solutions for the warehouse environment include:

- RFID and barcode labeling and scanning
- Real-time, location-based shipment tracking and reporting
- Tamper-resistant labeling
- Compliance labeling and documentation
- Shipping and receiving integration
- Automated inventory management
- Put-away, picking and packing
- Secure wireless connectivity
Field sales, merchandising and direct store delivery

Wireless technology from IBM, Motorola and Zebra can radically enhance the efficiency and accuracy of product movement from distributor to retailer. New routing information can be transmitted on the move and shipments scanned as they're delivered, with proof transmitted immediately back up the supply chain. Receipts and invoices can be printed as needed, simplifying workflows and making them more efficient while reducing the chance for error. Sales force automation solutions allow orders to be placed on the spot, cutting days out of the resupply process.

Inside the store, print-on-demand solutions that integrate with retailer systems can simplify shelf labeling and merchandise tagging while saving time and reducing errors. Merchandising and trade store promotions can be optimized through tracking of in-store promotional rebates and planogram compliance, along with competitive data. This gives consumer packaged goods companies much greater insight into the value chain by extending visibility beyond delivery and into the retailer itself. It also helps reduce out-of-stock situations and lost sales helping to strengthen brand positioning.

Solutions for delivery and merchandising include:

- Barcode and RFID tag printing
- Route accounting, reconciliation and dispatch
- Proof of delivery and condition
- Mobile invoice and receipt printing
- Mobile CRM and order management
- Sales force automation, surveys and promotions
- Retail merchandising
- Trade promotion management and optimization
- Planograms

Experience and knowledge that deliver strong results

From receipt of raw materials to the factory floor, the finished goods warehouse, loading dock, delivery truck and into retail stores, solutions from IBM, Motorola and Zebra are in use around the world, and around the clock. These incorporate a wide range of mobile and wireless devices – wearable computers, scanners, ruggedized tablets and more built by Motorola, and everything from in-vehicle printers to RFID labelers by Zebra. IBM provides the business, communications and IT integration expertise, and back-end technology that ties it all together.

Of particular importance is the team’s deep industry knowledge based on real-world experience. Rather than one-size-fits-all answers, solutions are specifically designed for the needs of industries including manufacturing, distribution and retail. Each engagement is tailored and can include any combination of technology and services from initial assessment to design, deployment and operations, to ongoing mobility management and support. IBM also offers attractive financing, with innovative terms that can link investments to the achievement of business benefits.

The proven effectiveness of the decades-long relationship rests in its complementary nature, which draws on the best from each company. Solutions are proven and built from the ground up to work together for faster time-to-value and lower risk. IBM, Motorola and Zebra are driven by outcomes – helping make the entire value chain smarter, while addressing the needs of individual businesses. The result is a seamless, effective mobile capability, whether it's designed for use on the factory floor, at the distribution center or on the road.

For more information

To learn more about how IBM, Motorola and Zebra can help you employ mobile technology to transform your value chain from end to end, contact your IBM representative or visit us at

ibm.com/services