

Effective Cross-Border Supply Chain Management for SMBs in 2025

Overcoming Hurdles to Minimize Risk,
Maximize Efficiency, and Build Lasting Resilience



Introduction

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) often encounter steep challenges in cross-border logistics. While the supply chain is the heart of global commerce, managing it requires meticulous planning, adaptability, and innovation in a constantly changing global market teeming with regulatory complexities and infrastructure obstacles.

It's no wonder that [73% of SMB](#) owners consider regulatory compliance a major barrier. Impending tariffs are creating concern for 80% of business owners, who anticipate a [20% increase](#) in the cost of moving goods internationally in 2025 and beyond. The stakes are high for a business function where even minor paperwork errors can create major delays.

The stakes are even higher for food manufacturers and small food brands who manufacture their own products. These businesses must consider food safety, complex global food regulations, and public health risks—all of which make rigorous supply chain management crucial. Effective, technology-informed supply chain management can “transform your whole business,” according to Jeremy Schneider, Owner and President of Schneider Food Safety Services. How can SMBs optimize their supply chain strategies amid the year's biggest obstacles?

In this ebook, we'll discuss the major challenges small and medium-sized food manufacturing businesses face in 2025, including:

- **Quality control**
- **Verification**
- **Logistics** of working across time zones, borders, and language barriers

Alongside each challenge, we'll present practical solutions with insights from a number of leaders in food manufacturing logistics, compliance, and quality, including Jeremy Schneider, Owner and President at Schneider Food Safety Services; Justin Blaney, Food Safety and Quality Director at Create A Pack Foods; and Russ Meinhardt, Consultant at Acumen Impact.

Why SMBs Must Prioritize Supply Chain Management Today



A recent survey of SMBs found that they are disproportionately impacted by supply chain disruptions that began with the global COVID-19 pandemic and have persisted due to extreme weather and financial and geopolitical volatility. Small business resilience requires innovation in how supply chains are managed. With efficient management of cross-border trade, small businesses are equipped to create agile supply chains that help them withstand disruptions and adapt more readily to market changes with:

- **Enhanced visibility**

Using technology to manage supplier and procurement, inventory, production, logistics, and distribution data can help businesses balance inventory and demand, forecast challenges, identify vulnerabilities and risks, and create effective contingency plans.

- **Minimized risk:**

Turning fragmented, reactive processes into data-driven strategies with visibility into supplier performance, shipment tracking, and compliance documentation can help companies anticipate and respond quickly to bottlenecks, maintain tight quality

control, and ensure compliance despite ever-changing cross-border regulations.

- **Advanced automation:**

Streamlining the complexities of cross-border logistics by automating workflows, including customs documentation, compliance checks, and trade classification, frees staff from repetitive tasks while minimizing costly human errors.

To remain competitive, SMBs must keep up with advances in supply chain management best practices and supporting technologies. By embracing innovation and devoting resources to optimization, SMBs can make their supply chains markedly less fragile. Optimization not only protects against disruption but also creates a competitive advantage, allowing businesses to operate more efficiently, adapt more quickly, and build stronger relationships with partners and customers.

Naturally, there are challenges along the path to optimization. Let's discuss some of the most pressing obstacles food manufacturers face in the supply chain today.

Challenge: **Quality Control**

For U.S. food manufacturers that are part of an international supply chain, quality control is a balancing act between meeting customer expectations, ensuring food safety, and navigating a web of supplier complexities. The objective is, as Blaney said, “no recalls, no customer complaints ... and providing a repeatable experience, no matter which box the customer grabs.”

Yet, these standards can be difficult to maintain when SMBs have limited leverage over cross-border partners, relying instead on middlemen to resolve quality issues. Given regulatory differences and long supply chains, corrective action can be a long time coming. When quality issues arise upstream, “you may not see any change for six months or a year,” Schneider said. This lag makes it difficult for businesses to enforce consistent standards and respond quickly to emergent risks. Yet, that doesn’t mean threats to quality can be ignored.

As Meinhardt was quick to point out, recalls remain the single greatest threat to SMBs operating in this sphere.

“It can tank a small business,” he explained, “because it is a hit to their brand equity.”



Solution: **Standardized Incoming Documentation**

SMBs can leverage digital platforms to automate supplier verification and check incoming documentation to quickly grasp provenance. This facilitates high-quality batches that meet specifications even before they enter production at the local level. Issues that would otherwise be missed until products are closer to reaching the consumer—raw materials that deviate from defined specifications, for example—are more readily identified with proactive monitoring through platforms that can automate this level of quality control.

Challenge: **Verification**

One of the most significant hurdles in global food safety management is the variance in food safety laws and regulations between countries. Products that meet safety standards in one country may not comply with regulations in another.

This patchwork creates a puzzle for food manufacturers and exporters, which can make verification cumbersome. Since records that ensure compliance with U.S. regulations might arrive in different formats and even different languages, verification is often more than cumbersome—it's nearly impossible. "Each supplier, each ingredient—they all require documentation," Blaney explained. "It's time-consuming to get into a system in order to make a bill of material. It's a really manual process."

For small businesses, this collection, validation, and storage of information can also be prone to errors, which compromises both compliance and quality.

As companies navigate different regulatory frameworks, "the supplier is not necessarily held to the same level as the domestic supply and doesn't have the same standards in place," Blaney said. "Getting to the same level can be a challenge." Without verification systems, SMBs risk non-compliance, which can delay production and lead to recalls.



Solution: **Compliance on Autopilot**

For resource-constrained SMB food manufacturers, the manual collection and verification of supplier records can feel impossible. Automating and centralizing compliance shifts that burden off small teams by monitoring documentation across suppliers, countries, and languages 24/7.

Instead of chasing paper trails or struggling to normalize inconsistent formats, SMBs can use digitized workflows to flag missing certifications, expired records, or deviations in quality standards automatically. This not only reduces errors but also ensures that critical compliance steps aren't dependent on having a full-time compliance manager (out of budget for many SMBs). With real-time visibility and streamlined traceability, SMBs can confidently verify suppliers, stay aligned with shifting regulations, and safeguard both product quality and brand reputation, without stretching already limited resources.

Challenge: **International Logistics**

Managing logistics across time zones, borders, and language barriers presents a persistent challenge for many businesses. Communication with suppliers can be slow and fragmented for these reasons, extending the time it takes to obtain information or resolve issues. Menihardt described the situation as difficult: “Translations add complexity. And then there’s time zones. You can send an email in the morning and not get a response until that night. It’s just a much longer cycle, and things get lost in translation.”

For relatively small businesses with limited staff and resources, these extended and complicated cycles create bottlenecks as well as frustrations. SMBs don’t have “boots on the ground” with their partners worldwide, which makes longer lead times, miscommunication, and operational inefficiencies all too common.



Solution: **Automated Formatting and Translation**

Streamlining cross-border logistics and reducing the friction created by doing business with global suppliers are tough. But new solutions can centralize communication, provide quick updates on shipments, certifications, and compliance statuses, and even standardize documents and translate them through the power of artificial intelligence.

With powerful technology to solve difficulties that come with cross-border supply chains, companies can turn manual processes into standardized workflows, minimize miscommunications, and shorten response times.



How to Optimize Supply Chain Management: A Step-By-Step Guide

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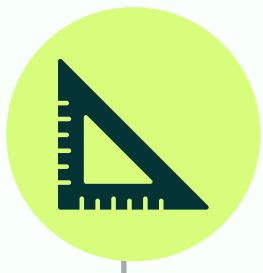


Step 1: Define How You Quantify Success

A strategy is bound to fail if you can’t define success. Start by clarifying your business objectives and put numbers to them wherever possible.

Ask yourself:

- **Cost reduction:** How much is your current compliance process costing you? Where are you overspending?
- **Efficiency:** How much time is wasted on manual tasks that automation could eliminate?
- **Customer satisfaction:** What’s the cost to customer trust for late shipments or quality issues?
- **Risk management:** How do you measure the financial and reputational risk of a recall?
- **Sustainability:** Are supply chain inefficiencies undermining sustainability goals?



Step 2: Measure Your Current Process

With success defined, it's time to establish your baseline. Conduct a clear-eyed assessment of your supply chain today:

- **Map** the supply chain from origin to consumption
- **Identify** bottlenecks, delays, and compliance weak spots
- **Analyze** current data for trends and hidden costs
- **Compare** your current strategy against your objectives

This measurement gives you the benchmark to identify gaps and track progress. It will also give you a heads up as to which suppliers or regions may require more attention and oversight down the road.



Step 3: Create a Standardized Audit Process

For SMBs with team members who wear multiple hats, standardization isn't just helpful—it's essential. A standardized supplier audit program creates consistency across your international supply chain, ensuring that you're applying the same rigorous criteria and gathering the same foundational paperwork regardless of whether you're evaluating suppliers in Mexico or Malaysia. A standardized process minimizes oversight gaps, reduces decision fatigue, and enables any team member to step in when needed.

Your standardized audit program should include:

- **Clear audit frequency schedules** based on supplier risk levels (for example, quarterly for high-risk suppliers, annually for established partners)
- **Digital checklists** that cover food safety certifications, facility conditions, and quality control processes.
- **A plan to maintain all documentation in a centralized platform** that's accessible to your entire team, creating transparency and reducing time spent tracking down information or transitioning information from one employee to another.

By standardizing these processes, you transform auditing from a time-consuming burden into a repeatable system that protects your brand while scaling efficiently with your business.



Step 4: Identify Gaps in Your Technology

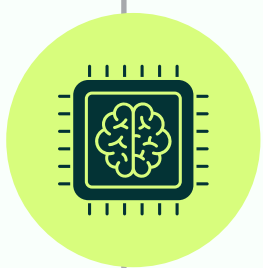
Technology plays an important role in supply chain optimization, and most SMBs have gaps in their tech stack. A proper tech stack should encompass everything your company uses to manage data, automate processes, increase efficiency, and track performance.

Identify gaps where your current tech stack falls short or slows you down.

Red flags include:

- **Manual tasks** that could be automated
- **Siloed data** that is hard to access or analyze
- Lack of **real-time visibility** into supplier compliance or inventory
- **Outdated systems** that don't scale or integrate easily

These gaps show where technology investments will deliver the highest ROI, helping you create a roadmap for the tools and capabilities needed and setting the stage for AI to deliver maximum impact.



Step 4: Close the Gaps With AI

Defining, measuring, and mapping your process is only the beginning. Closing the gaps is where transformation happens.

Around the world, AI is transforming food manufacturing supply chains from reactive to proactive. AI-driven solutions like [BruceAI](#) automate compliance verification, translate and standardize international documentation, and flag quality risks before they derail your operations.

That means:

- **Lower costs** and fewer manual errors
- **Faster, smarter compliance checks**
- **Stronger traceability and risk prevention**
- **A supply chain that adapts** as quickly as the market changes

This isn't about preparing to optimize; it's about optimizing **now**. The opportunity is here.

The real question is: How long can you afford to wait?

Build Resilience Through Smarter Supply Chains



In the face of mounting global challenges, small and medium-sized food manufacturers must evolve their supply chain strategies. The complexities of cross-border logistics, coupled with mandatory verification and the need for robust quality control mean that leaders in these markets can't sit on their hands—they must create a proactive approach to management.

Embracing new technology is not merely an option for SMBs—it's a necessity to navigate 2025's cross-border supply challenges effectively.

By integrating advanced digital solutions developed specifically for small businesses navigating international supply chains, SMBs can automate tasks, centralize data, and reduce risks and operational bottlenecks. As anyone who runs a small business knows, this kind of optimization also acts as a safeguard for both product integrity and brand reputation.

BruceAI was developed as a comprehensive platform for SMBs in food manufacturing to simplify compliance, improve traceability, and automate

critical processes. With intuitive tools that centralize supplier documentation, monitor quality metrics, and facilitate integration with existing systems, BruceAI enables growth without compromising on safety.

Are you ready to position your business for sustained success in a dynamic, ever-changing global marketplace? Let BruceAI help get you there. Find out more [here](#).

*BruceAI

BruceAI is an intelligent supplier compliance platform designed to help growth-focused food manufacturers, brands, and distributors reduce the administrative burden of supplier management with intelligent supplier document verification and monitoring, advanced analytics for proactive risk management, and centralized dashboards for instant audit readiness. Backed by **1848 Ventures**, BruceAI enables small and medium-sized (SMB) food companies to accelerate supplier onboarding, reduce labor costs, and accelerate market expansion and growth. Learn more at Bruce-AI.com or [register](#) for a free account today.