
DR RAKESH KUMAR SINHA



As economic activity picks up, logistics services will come back to a reasonably high level. Last-mile delivery will undergo a significant transformation as consumers demand more and more goods and services, delivered to their doorsteps in a safe and hygienic manner. We can see clear trends in faster transit time, track and trace of consignments, and digitisation of the entire supply chain, says **DR RAKESH KUMAR SINHA, FOUNDER & CEO, REFLEXIVE SUPPLY CHAIN SOLUTIONS** in an interview with Ajeet Kumar. The expert also talks about flexibility in the entire supply chain which would help in synchronising supplies to dynamically changing consumer demands and that these operations must be performed in a fast and efficient manner to improve India's manufacturing competitiveness.

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Post-lockdown, how long would you estimate it would take for our industry to get back to business as usual?

What will be the growth drivers?

The pandemic has changed certain consumer behaviors at the fundamental level. Many industry segments have also been reshaped. The speed of recovery would depend on the pandemic coming under control and consumer confidence coming back. I believe it would take about three to four quarters for most

companies to get back to their pre-COVID levels.

In my opinion, there would be two main growth drivers. The first and foremost is understanding the changed consumer behavior and rejigging the portfolio offering accordingly. Some companies would actively work towards shaping consumer behaviour further for faster industry growth. The second growth driver would be the ability of the company's supply chain to adapt to the changing market construct and max-

imise the service level. It would mean synchronising supply with demand, building flexibility in operations and improving the speed of response.

How your organisation had been providing customer experience during the lockdown?

A lot of transactions have gone online. In such a scenario, it's important to provide a trouble-free and reliable interface, which customers, both current and potential, can access on a need basis. We

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have incorporated flexibility in our schedules and improved the speed of response in all our offerings.

The consumer sentiment being low now and considering economic downturn across the globe, what will be the scenario of logistics services required in the next couple of years?

As economic activity picks up, logistics services will come back to a reasonably high level. Last-mile delivery will undergo a significant transformation as consumers demand more and more goods and services, delivered to their doorsteps in a safe and hygienic manner. We can see clear trends in faster transit time, track and trace of consignments, and digitisation of the entire supply chain. Interfaces between various supply chain partners need to be smooth and efficient to improve the overall consumer experience.

Experts say the industry will also see a lot of automation across industries with less staff and more of machines doing the job. Is this a curious case of commercial consideration or a business continuity necessity?

It's quite likely that automation would accelerate, especially in those sectors where staff availability is a challenge. Several manual touchpoints would get automated to improve the safety and hygiene of products and services. These would be pre-requisites to operate in the new normal, for commercial consideration as well as for business continuity.

Can we expect more automation coming into the entire supply chain for the handling of cargo in a multimodal network?

Definitely! Automation is expected to accelerate in the entire supply chain to help in terms of safety, hygiene and sustainability of operations. Freight handling as well as warehousing would witness more automation as we go forward.

Do you see some modal shifts in the way the industry had been working earlier?

The industry needs to get more responsive to changing consumer needs by improving on the following three dimensions.

First and foremost, batch sizes across the entire supply chain would reduce, thereby increasing the frequency of servicing... right from vendors delivering in smaller lots, factories taking shorter production runs, and logistics companies delivering more often.

Secondly, the supply chain would get more flexible in terms of multiple vendors for the same item, multiple products on the same production line, and an assorted portfolio in the same consignment. Flexibility in the entire supply chain would help in synchronising supplies to dynamically changing consumer demand.

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Thirdly, the speed of response would become a competitive advantage for everyone in the supply chain – vendors, factories and logistics service providers. Players who are slow to respond would lose out to those who respond more quickly.

Safety and hygiene would become pre-requisites to operate.

What are the areas logistics professionals globally need to keep an eye on, and put up a unified front?

As an important part of the value chain, our eyes should be on the changing needs of consumers. If we keep our eyes firmly on consumers and adopt requisite practices to serve their needs, everything else falls in place. Secondly, various players in the value chain must work for a win-win solution to make it sustainable in the long run. Inter-dependence on each other makes the supply chain even more robust.

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As India is trying to be a manufacturing hub - how can the logistics ecosystem players need to gear up in supporting India's dream of becoming a manufacturing hub?

The logistics ecosystem serves such a manufacturing hub in two distinct ways. Firstly, it gets all input materials from all over the world to various manufacturing sites. Secondly, it reaches the finished products to customers and consumers across the globe. These operations must be performed in a fast and efficient manner to improve India's manufacturing competitiveness. Our internal objectives should be subservient to what the consumers need from such a manufacturing hub.

In the later phase of lockdown, what is the ground reality? Has seamless transport systems been restored?

Most of the transport systems are getting back to normal. However, challenges continue in containment zones, where operations are severely constrained. Contactless delivery and social distancing norms at warehouses and transport hubs are prodding the sector towards a higher level of digitisation, safety and hygiene. 